

Roald Amundsen's expeditions from 1918 to 1926 in media and politics

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Abstract

Roald Amundsen's expeditions in his late career, from 1918 to 1926, became increasingly dependent upon a close cooperation with the media. The media cooperating with Amundsen were primarily positive in their coverage, as negative factors were seldom printed. Towards the end of the period investigated, the cooperation became so close that it may be called a defining factor. After the *Maud* expedition, the expeditions were decreasingly related to science and increasingly related to sensation and sport. This trend culminated with the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. Amundsen, although important, became less and less of a critical factor to the completion of his expeditions, as he became increasingly dependent on others to use advanced technology such as airplanes and airships that relied on large-scale logistics to function. He also became increasingly celebrated and magnified as a resource to further the agendas of nations, institutions and individuals.

Oppsummering

Roald Amundsens ekspedisjoner i den siste delen av karrieren hans, fra 1918 til 1926, ble gradvis mer avhengige av et tett samarbeid med media. Mediene som samarbeidet med Amundsen hadde hovedsakelig en positiv vinkling på nyhetene om ham og hans ekspedisjoner, og negative faktorer ble sjelden nevnt. Mot slutten av perioden som undersøkes ble dette samarbeidet så tett at det kan kalles en definerende faktor. Etter Maud-ekspedisjonen fokuserte ekspedisjonene i stadig mindre grad på vitenskap og i stadig større grad på sensasjon og sport. Denne trenden kulminerte med Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. Selv om Amundsen var viktig, ble hans tilstedeværelse i stadig mindre grad en avgjørende faktor for at ekspedisjonene hans kunne fullføres, siden han ble mer og mer avhengig av andre som kunne betjene avansert teknologi som fly og luftskip, som var avhengig av omfattende logistikk for å kunne fungere. Amundsen ble også i økende grad feiret og hyllet, og ble dermed en ressurs som kunne brukes for å fremme nasjoner, institusjoner og enkeltpersoners agendaer.

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1

Introduction, thesis and sources

“I stood there and watched the machine in the air, thinking of my long sled trip over the Antarctic. In one hour it covered distances in the polar areas one would have used days and had much hardship traversing with a sleigh.³”

Roald Amundsen was the world’s most famous and successful polar explorer. The popular image of Amundsen was that of a hero, an individual with an unbending will who did things no other man had managed to do. When he died in 1928, he had circumnavigated the Arctic, conquered the South Pole and flown over the Arctic basin and the North Pole. The early career of Amundsen, from his first expedition with *Gjøa* to his conquest of the South Pole, has been the subject of many historians and numerous literary accounts.

Tor Bomann-Larsen discovered new material on Amundsen. This led to his biography *Roald Amundsen – en biografi*, published in 1995. Historians have also used the new material in the three-volume work *Norsk Polarhistorie I – III*, published in 2004. The historians’ work show that there are still many unresolved questions with regards Amundsen’s activities after the South Pole, and they need to be studied in further detail. Amundsen’s late life was turbulent, problematic and puzzling. It shows that Amundsen was a complex individual. His underlying problem after the conquest of the South Pole was to maintain the image as the world’s leading polar explorer in an age of rapid change. Amundsen knew that his inherited, traditional mode of exploration was becoming obsolete. To study how he made the transition to modern exploration, one has to go back to his mentor, Fridtjof Nansen.

Nansen is important because it appears that he attempted to create a new definition of what it was to be Norwegian. In the early 20th century, it was common to talk about nations of culture and civilization. The world was divided into classes. Based on a Darwinist view of survival of the fittest, nations were judged by the biology and the “eugenics” of its people, and given a place in the hierarchy of nations. Industrial production, innovation, science, and military

³Roald Amundsen cited in *Aftenposten*. Year 66. No 166. Saturday, 1 April 1925. Author’s translation.

standing were important, as they were used as markers for what made a nation fittest to survive. On top of this list were the European races⁴, at the bottom the Africans. Within Europe, the hierarchy was a bit more nuanced. The question was; where did the new nation of Norway fit in? Given that Norway only gained its independence in 1905, what had Norway done for the civilized world? What advances had this tiny nation on the edge of the eternal ice brought to the stage of culture, conquest, science, technology or industry? How was Norway equipped for the struggle of survival? Fridtjof Nansen, who began his career as an explorer by crossing Greenland in 1888, led the way with his Arctic drift with the ship *Fram* from 1893 to 1896. His actions with *Fram* have been seen as the beginning of a contemporary campaign to make Norway a polar nation. Narve Fulsås writes in “En æressag for vor nation” (“A question of glory for our nation”) that Fridtjof Nansen’s expedition with *Fram* was a national issue with the goal to unite Norwegians in a time when the nation was split between those who wished to end the union with Sweden, and those who did not.⁵ Seen from this perspective, the Norwegian government funded the expedition in order to further the cause of Norway and to ensure that the expedition made scientific contributions to civilization. The return of Nansen was important for two reasons: First, it made Norway known for polar activities.⁶ Second, due to the telegraph and the mass media, his survival became as simultaneous celebration all over the nation (and the world) as a national achievement.⁷

In *En norsk elite*, Bodil Stenseth states that Nansen was a central character of the Lysakerkretsen (the Lysaker group), consisting of neonational romantic artists and writers.⁸ Here, the ancient, represented by the proverbial Vikings, and the modern were fused. This group had significant impact on how one viewed what it was to be Norwegian as well as on the Norwegian cultural heritage. At the time, a retranslation of the *Snorre saga* used Fridtjof Nansen as a model for the illustrations of the Viking king Olav Trygvasson.⁹ This fusion appears to have been influenced by Thomas Carlyle and his book *Heroes and hero worship*, where he makes a connection between the strong man and history. The history and society

⁴ Roy, William G. *Making Societies. The Historical Construction of Our World*. Boston: Pine Forge Press, 2001. On race: 74-109. Race and identity: 104.

⁵ Fulsås, Arve. “En æressag for vor nation” in Einar Arne Drivnes, Harald Dag Jølle (ed). *Norsk Polarhistorie I. Ekspedisjonene*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2004. 193–194.

⁶ Fulsås *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 195.

⁷ Fulsås *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 196.

⁸ Stenseth, Bodil. *En norsk elite: Nasjonsbyggerne på Lysaker 1890–1940*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 1993; Fredheim, Arnt. “Lysakerkretsen” Store Norske Leksikon. Copyright: Store Norske Leksikon. URL: <http://snl.no/Lysakerkretsen>

⁹ Hødnebo, Finn. (ed.) *Snorre de første kongene Del I Norges kongesagaer av Snorre Sturlason*. Oslo: J. M. Stenersens Forlag AS, 2007. See illustrations page 157 ,159, 165 and 169.

known at the time was the result of work done by great men.¹⁰ Nansen was seen as such a man, and Nansen saw Amundsen as such a man. He made this clear during the memorial service after Amundsen's death.¹¹ Included in the group was also Nordahl Rolfsen¹², whose illustrated reading books for children were an essential part of the Norwegian language education from the first edition and well into the 1960's. Eric Hobsbawm writes in *The Invention of Tradition* that the period from 1870 to 1914 was an era when traditions were mass-produced. The dominant type of invented tradition was the type that sought to establish or symbolize membership in a group, social cohesion, or a nation.¹³ In this case the invention of the polar nation as a social cohesion for the new nation of Norway. Inventing national traditions was essential, with emphasis on "(...) nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest." In Norway, there appears to have been a need to create a new way of looking at what was Norwegian and where Norway belonged in a global context. Hobsbawm states that where there was a need, "(...) the state linked both formal and informal, official and unofficial, political and social inventions of traditions (...)." ¹⁴ The work of Nansen and his influence with leading members of Norway's cultural life may have created a tradition, and this might be interpreted as the invention of the tradition of Norway as *the* polar nation. The tradition that Norway was a polar nation was invented in the 1890's, through Nansen's work and the work of his Lysakerkrets. But the issue is not as simple as this could lead us to believe. In *Jakten på det norske*, Øystein Sørensen mentions 11 different political movements that attempted to define Norway as a nation before 1905, and this does not include the polar nation.¹⁵ Sørensen writes that one has to look at the strength and intensity of the Norwegian identity, in comparison to other identities.¹⁶

Amundsen benefited from his early cooperation with Nansen. Nansen and Otto Sverdrup had developed radical new ways of exploring the north, in cooperation with and inspired by Arctic natives.¹⁷ The use of dogs, sleighs, skis, Inuit clothing and meticulous planning were crucial

¹⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *Om herosdyrkelse eller store mænd, deres væsen og betydning*. Bergen: Ed. B. Giertsens forlag, 1888. 1–2.

¹¹ Nansen, Fridtjof in A. H. Winsnes (ed) *Nansens Røst Artikler og Taler av Fridtjof Nansen II 1908–1930*. Oslo: Jacob Dybwads forlag, 1942. 691–697.

¹² Author of popular children's reading books; Johnsen, Egil Børre, "Nordahl Rolfsen", *Store Norske Leksikon*, Copyright Store Norske Leksikon, URL: http://snl.no/nbl_biografi/Nordahl_Rolfsen/utdypning (13.10.2011).

¹³ Hobsbawm, Eric. *Invention of Tradition* London: Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1995. 9.

¹⁴ Hobsbawm. *Invention of Tradition*. 1995. 264.

¹⁵ Sørensen, Øystein. "Hegemonikamp og det norske, Elitens nasjonsbyggingsprosjekter 1770–1945" in Øystein Sørensen (ed) *Jakten på det norske. Perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2001. 17–42.

¹⁶ Sørensen. *Jakten på det norske*. 2001. 15.

¹⁷ Riffenburg, Beau. *The Myth of the Explorer*. London: Belhaven press, 1993. 114.

factors. They invented what was considered the traditional Norwegian mode of exploration, and their work made Norway a reputable polar nation. When Amundsen (and his men) went south, they perfected the methods pioneered by Nansen and Sverdrup.

In literature, Amundsen's biographer Tor Bomann-Larsen flatly states that Amundsen was not a nation builder, he built himself. Amundsen had no agenda regarding the future of Norway; he had barely asked himself basic political questions.¹⁸ This was in stark contrast to Fridtjof Nansen, who Carl Emil Vogt in *Fridtjof Nansen mannen og verden*, states not only wanted to create a new Norway, he also wanted to make a new and better world.¹⁹ This is also made clear by Bomann-Larsen, who claims that Amundsen had become a great man, but a small Nansen.²⁰ Despite Amundsen not being a nation builder, his expeditions can be seen as a way to define Norway symbolically, and to make Norway known in the world.

During the early parts of his career, Amundsen was dedicated to research and science, it was his later actions to become more sensational that made Amundsen break with science.²¹ *Gjøa* was his first expedition. This expedition was based on science and achieved an international first simultaneously, as he sailed through the Northwest Passage. Amundsen's conquest of the South Pole made him famous for achieving his goal and notorious because he deceived his nation and Nansen. Amundsen was not supposed to conquer the South Pole; he was to make a polar drift across the Arctic basin and to scientific research.²² The initial idea was launched in 1908, in the Geographical Society in Norway²³. It was to be the third expedition with Nansen's *Fram*. The first had been Nansen's own polar drift, and the second had been Otto Sverdrup's mapping and exploration of Ellesmere Island, between Greenland and Canada. Amundsen's *Fram III* expedition was not directed towards the North Pole, however, it was used to conquer the South Pole.

It appears that Amundsen's dedication to science began to wane after the South Pole expedition. Nansen demanded that Amundsen complete what he had promised, to drift over the Arctic basin, as he should have done with *Fram III*,²⁴ conducting a scientific study. The *Maud* expedition was the last classic, Norwegian drift expedition. It was both a continuation

¹⁸ Tor Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. Oslo: J. W. Cappelens forlag AS 1995. 100.

¹⁹ Vogt, Carl Emil. *Fridtjof Nansen mannen og verden* Oslo: Cappelen Damm AS, 2011. 269.

²⁰ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 100.

²¹ Friedman, Robert Marc. "Amundsen, Nansen, and the question of science: dramatizing historical research on the polar heroic." *Endeavour* (2011) URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2011.08.004>

²² Jølle, Harald Dag "Nansen: Oppdageren" Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 2011. 409-410.

²³ Amundsen, Roald. *Nordostpassagen*. Kristiania: Gyldendalske boghandel, 1921. 1.

²⁴ Kjørheim, Steinar. *Nansens Brev III*, Letter 549 to Roald Amundsen, 2 April 1913.

of and carried out in Fridtjof Nansen's spirit as a scientist. The goal of the expedition was to answer a number of unresolved questions related to the Arctic. It was done in the traditional Amundsen fashion, silently sneaking away from the dock, but the master-mind behind the expedition was Nansen, duly supported by the Norwegian government, which saw it all as a way to further Norwegian interests in the Arctic.

Amundsen changed his mode of transportation after *Maud*. The full consequences of this change were not apparent at first. The traditional was swapped for the sensational. Amundsen was also to notice that the increased emphasis on sensation was not as easy as it may have seemed. The world in general had become air-minded, and in the USA, which Amundsen frequently visited, the concept of air travel had taken on religious aspects, as claimed by Joseph Corn in *The Winged Gospel*. Corn writes that the pace in which "miracles seemed to occur in the sky, thrilled contemporaries", and that these miracles were in a way creating a new concept of time and distance.²⁵ These "holy" machines were used to explore the unknown Arctic, "the sublime desolation", making instant heroes²⁶, as with Byrd in America (and Amundsen in Norway).

Airplanes and airships would also become an important part of Amundsen's expeditions, and he became increasingly dependent on others to complete his expeditions. According to *Airships in International Affairs, 1890–1940*, airships were an important factor in international politics and the only man-made vessel thought to be effective in Arctic exploration.²⁷ Guillaume de Syon states that the airship had a profound psychological impact on the imagination of the contemporary spirit, and that they made a strong impression on contemporary Europe.²⁸ As Duggan and Meyer states: "Psychologically, for many an individual the airship was more than poetry. It represented anticipation of pleasure and wish-fulfilment."²⁹

The greatest technological challenge and logistical feat in any of Amundsen's expeditions was the inclusion of an airship in his last expedition. Airships were rare, but in the 1920's, they were part of the contemporary spirit and a yardstick for what an airplane had to achieve in

²⁵ Corn, Joseph. *The Winged Gospel, America's Romance with Aviation, 1900–1950*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1983. 15.

²⁶ Corn. *The Winged Gospel*. 1983. 15.

²⁷ Duggan, John and Henry Cord Meyer. *Airships in International Affairs, 1890–1940*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001. 105. 117–119.

²⁸ de Syon, Guillaume. *Zeppelin! Germany and the airship, 1900–1939*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002. 1-3.

²⁹ Duggan and Meyer. *Airships in International Affairs, 1890-1940*. 2001. 5.

order to be competitive. In the 1920's, the airship was the Rolls Royce of flying vessels. They were expensive, but were capable of delivering stunning achievements, both in range and durability. In 1917, the *LZ 104* travelled 5,700 kilometres in 95 hours before landing, a feat that an airplane was not able to surpass or even match at the time, nor for many years to come.³⁰ The airships' achievements also made them sublime in a cultural-historical perspective. That Roald Amundsen, the world's greatest polar explorer, ended his career by flying over the North Pole (the top of the world) in a machine that was one of the world's most advanced, made a genuine impression on the contemporary world.

Amundsen turned away from science and devoted himself more to sensation and sport as the most important means to achieve his goals and this became increasingly defining to his polar career after the *Maud* expedition. Amundsen had to cooperate with institutions such as Norsk Luftseiladsforening (NLF) in order to attract support from the media, private sponsors and individuals. His helpers also had to recruit personnel with the technical expertise necessary to achieve Amundsens ambitions. This happened simultaneously with his expertise and know-how becoming less vital to a successful expedition. It is somewhat ironic that Amundsen in the end was worshipped as a national hero for activities where he in fact was a passive spectator.

Thesis

Media dependency and the commercialization of exploration increasingly defined Roald Amundsen's expeditions. The media, which cooperated with Amundsen were primarily positive in their coverage; negative factors were seldom printed. The expeditions were decreasingly related to science and increasingly related to sensation and sport. Amundsen was less of a critical factor to the completion of his expeditions as he became increasingly dependent on others to use advanced technology that relied on large-scale logistics. Amundsen also became increasingly celebrated and magnified in order to further the agendas of others, such as the Norwegian and Italian governments and individuals.

Media

Media, newspapers, magazines, lectures, books and film; all were constantly obsessed with Amundsen. From the middle of the 1920's, the previously objective and distant media changed its character as the relationship between the expeditions and the media became so

³⁰ de Syon, *Zeppelin! Germany and the airship*, 2002. 87.

close that it changed into something that can best be described as a protocoooperation. The term protocoooperation comes from biology and is the definition of two species cooperating for mutual benefit, although they do not need to cooperate to survive.

The protocoooperation concerns the commercialization of exploration, which needs further explanation. In *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*,³¹ Gerald J. Baldasty writes that there was a bond between news, advertisements and the reader. This bond was made explicit at the end of the nineteenth century, as newspapers were increasingly seen as a business and “(...) news were valued and defined within that context.”³² As a business, the goal was to earn a living for both the employees and the stockholder. The newspapers’ income came increasingly from advertisement space, which was sold based on the number of readers the newspaper had on a daily basis. Urbanization, industrialization, population growth and an increased focus on products made advertisements a major source of income.³³ It was at this point that news became commercialized as “Publishers and editors realized that they could make large profits by pitching newspaper content to the masses and then selling their huge audiences to advertisers.”³⁴ So newspapers largely stopped looking at news as a means to inform the populace on political preferences and current events, but rather saw it as something to market.³⁵ As newspapers began to pitch their content to the masses, they turned increasingly to sensation in order to sell their advertisements, and what could be more sensational than the exploration of the unknown polar areas by explorer heroes?

In *The Myth of the Explorer*, Beau Riffenburgh writes on the relationship of the press and the explorer. Riffenburgh writes that the media’s interest in expeditions began with the urbanization of cities, as this was the first time when people had the opportunity to choose between several newspapers and bought the one with the most appealing front page. This forced the quality papers to adapt to sensational modes of selling their news, and exploration was one of the topics that became the most sensationalized in the 1880’s and 1890’s.³⁶ Riffenburgh uses Nansen as an example of a man who became a living icon, a hero, by means of his appearance and character, as well as by how he returned from his famous attempt to reach the North Pole. His return was sensational: “To most of the world, Nansen’s

³¹ Baldasty, Gerald J. *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

³² Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, 1992. 80.

³³ Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, 1992. 139.

³⁴ Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, 1992. 139.

³⁵ Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, 1992. 145.

³⁶ Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 1993. 119–120.

reappearance was like that of a man returning from the dead.”³⁷ Nansen became “(...) the darling of the international popular press (...).”³⁸ He became a figure that was used in the popular press to sell their sensational news. Riffenburgh views the Norwegian successors of Nansen as anachronistic. They were not in synchronization with the commercial aspects of exploration, as they did not perceive their activities as something to market. In the Anglo-American experience, the explorer went to the Arctic to attain “fame and fortune”, and sold himself to the media.³⁹ The Norwegian polar explorers post-Nansen were ignored in the American and English press due to the lack of sensationalism in their expeditions. Otto Sverdrup discovered and mapped significant tracts of new land, more than anyone since, but his work, his achievements and his results were ignored due to his way of matter-of-factly style of writing: “Otto Sverdrup’s account made his four years seem too easy, and gave visions of men in comfortable settings, well-fed, and able to enjoy their leisure time (...).”⁴⁰ Seen from the Anglo-American point of view, Roald Amundsen fared no better, but his early career could not be ignored due to the monumental nature of his achievements. As Riffenburgh claims, there was, however, always something obscure robbing Amundsen of his glory, such as the news being leaked during his journey through the Northwest Passage, and the death (and martyrdom) of Robert F. Scott during the race to the South Pole.⁴¹ Riffenburgh states that the explorers from both the USA and Great Britain were used to the idea of selling themselves to the media in order to fund their expeditions, but this was a novelty in Norway. The Norwegian polar explorers did not receive much media attention because they did not create as much “fuss” about their adventures as their British and American contemporaries did. It was not until Roald Amundsen began to cooperate with Rolf Thommessen⁴² that Norwegian exploration became truly commercial. That cooperation evolved into something more, namely a proto-cooperation between the media and the explorer, where the “fuss” and danger were turned into coin, used to finance further expeditions and also to shed favourable light on others with their own agendas.

³⁷ Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 1993. 140.

³⁸ Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 1993. 140.

³⁹ Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*. 1993.153.

⁴⁰ Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*. 1993. 161.

⁴¹ Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*. 1993. 162.

⁴² Rolf Thommessen: Editor of *Tidens Tegn* from 1917 to 1938. Died 1939. Also chairman of Norsk Luftseiladsforening 1925–1926; Ottosen, Rune, "Rolf Thommessen", Store Norske Leksikon, Copyright: Store Norske Leksikon. URL: http://snl.no/nbl_biografi/Rolf_Thommessen/utdypning (30.10.2011); Henrik P. Thommessen *Fra triumf til tragedie. Avisbedriften Tidens Tegn, 1910–1941* Oslo: Det humanistiske fakultet, 2009.

The foundation for this thesis consists of printed sources such as newspapers, contemporary accounts, the comic press, and literature. The newspaper material mainly originates from three newspapers, *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *Tidens Tegn*. These had large audiences in the capital, Kristiania (the name changed to Oslo in 1925). They were all newspapers of good repute during the time investigated, and representative of their day and age. Historically, the papers were different, as various part of the population formed their target audience. It must however be mentioned that *Tidens Tegn* lost much of its good reputation in the 1930's, as the newspaper became increasingly influenced by right-wing ideals. Odd-Bjørn Fure writes in *Norsk Utenrikspolitikk bind 3* that the press was divided into different social classes. Workers and workers' papers were sympathetic to the Soviet Union, while the more middle-class papers, such as *Aftenposten* and *Tidens Tegn*, had an understanding of and sympathy for the Fascist type of government (but were not Fascist papers). *Dagbladet* was the exception.⁴³ The newspapers in the capital Kristiania were located within a small geographical area close to Akersgaten. *Aftenposten* was founded in 1860 and has since the 1880's been known to be both conservative and independent. During the time in question, it was in good standing, had a good leadership and was the leading advertisement agency. The paper printed between two and three issues daily and had sound finances.⁴⁴ Statistics from *Aftenposten* show that about 75 percent of all business leaders in Kristiania read the paper, but only thirteen percent of the workers and foremen.⁴⁵ This only confirms that it was an upper middle-class newspaper with influence on leading members of society. At *Aftenposten*, it was Odd Arnesen who was the reporter writing on the Arctic and Antarctic news. He was known for his easy and entertaining style.⁴⁶ However, most articles from *Aftenposten* were not signed, and it cannot be verified that Arnesen was the author unless explicitly stated.

Dagbladet was founded in 1869, and at the time I am researching, the paper had a daily afternoon edition. The paper was known to focus on literature and the arts, and it was an organ for "culturally radical elements"⁴⁷ as well. *Dagbladet* was not a part of what became the union between the media and the expeditions. The newspaper was the sceptic towards both Amundsen himself and his expeditions. Its independence from the expeditions is the main

⁴³ Fure, Odd-Bjørn. "Mellomkrigstid 1920–1940." *Norsk Utenrikspolitikk. bind 3*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996. 20.

⁴⁴ Store Norske Leksikon. "Aftenposten" Store Norske Leksikon. No copyright. URL: <http://snl.no/Aftenposten> Visited: (09.03.2011)

⁴⁵ Wasberg, Gunnar Christie. *Aftenposten i hundre år 1860–1960*. Oslo: Chr. Schibsteds Forlag, 1960. 234–235.

⁴⁶ Wasberg, *Aftenposten i hundre år*. 1960. 231.

⁴⁷ Store Norske leksikon. "Dagbladet" Store Norske Leksikon. No Copyright. URL: <http://snl.no/Dagbladet> (09.03.2011)

reason why Dagbladet has been included. As an independent newspaper, it is less likely to conform to the thesis that Amundsen's expeditions received positive coverage in the media and that negative factors were kept hidden from the general public.

Tidens Tegn was founded in 1910 by Olav Thommessen. He had been the editor of *Verdens Gang* for years, but after a dispute, he and most of the staff left and founded their own paper. At its founding, it printed the political views of the liberal-conservative party Frisinnede Venstre.⁴⁸ *Tidens Tegn* was a success from the very first edition, due to the professional staff and Thommessen's popularity. Success led to more success, and the newspaper continued to grow. Rolf Thommessen (Olav Thommessen's son) became editor-in-chief in 1917 and held the position until 1938. As he took over the newspaper, there was a decided shift in the paper's style and views. In the 1920's, the paper was dedicated to the struggle to make the polar areas a Norwegian domain. The Greenland struggle with Denmark was one of the issues the paper found interesting.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the paper and its editor sympathized with and admired Fascist elements, such as the then new dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini.⁵⁰ Among his many positions, Thommessen was President of Norsk Luftseiladsforening (NLF), also known as the Aeroclub of Norway. *Tidens Tegn* hired out a journalist, Fredrik Ramm, to follow Roald Amundsen's aerial expeditions as a paid (or embedded) correspondent. We will dwell on this later. Amundsen was very popular with the paper's readers, and when he and Thommessen fell out, it caused such an upheaval that the newspaper had to open an office dedicated to handling all the readers who wanted to cancel their subscriptions.⁵¹ The paper ceased publication and its founding editor died in 1941. In addition to the above newspapers, other newspapers have been included to shed some light on the thesis from different angles.

The comic press has also been included, as it gives a satirical look at Amundsen's expeditions. The comic press is known for its ridicule, sharp satire and uncomfortable statement of the truth. The comic press was in no way scientific or objective, on the contrary, but it is apt at defining the essence of a complicated subject in a single sentence or a drawing. People read the comic press to get a cheap laugh, and at the same time receive a satirical view on current affairs. In Norway, the various magazines of the comic press usually led short lives. Old ones disappeared and new ones appeared, and there is little continuity. The comic

⁴⁸ Store Norske Leksikon. "Tidens Tegn" Store Norske Leksikon. No Copyright. URL: http://snl.no/Tidens_Tegn./morgenavis (09.03.2011)

⁴⁹ Ida Blom. *Kampen om Eirik Raudes Land*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1973. 206.

⁵⁰ Thommessen, Henrik P. *Fra triumf til tragedie avisbedriften Tidens Tegn 1910–1941*. Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, 2009. 155.

⁵¹ Thommessen, *Fra triumf til tragedie*, 2009. 182.

press also went through some major changes. The earlier magazines, from before the 1920's, were mostly uniform in appearance, with political caricatures and satire. During the 1920's some of the magazines lost their edge and transformed into pure joke rags. The magazines primarily used are *Hvepsen* (1905–1928, The Wasp) and *Karikaturen* (1917–1927, The Caricature). Others, such as *Korsaren* (The Corsair), are used sporadically.

Politics

Amundsen's expeditions can be seen as a resource in politics and national affairs. At the time when the *Maud* expedition set out, well over thirty years after Fram I, Norway was in a state of polar expansion, as Odd Gunnar Skagestad writes in *Norsk Polarpolitikk*. Skagestad defines the Norwegian interest as a way to secure two types of national interest: Primarily economic, to secure its citizens' economic activities in the area and secure possible resources for any future use. Second, to keep the national polar traditions alive in order to acquire national and international prestige.⁵² Skagestad also writes that from 1908 to 1919, Norway was a nation that probed the ground before launching a nationalist-expansive phase that lasted from 1919 to 1933.⁵³ Thus, Roald Amundsen's expeditions coincided with a phase of Norwegian polar policy marked by nationalist-expansive policies. Ida Blom writes in *Kampen om Eirik Raudes Land* that from 1921 to 1933, Norway was engaged in a diplomatic struggle with Denmark over the supremacy of East Greenland, an area that represented Norwegian economic interests and to which Norway had "historical" bonds. During this time, Norway also acquired ownership of the Spitsbergen Archipelago (known as Svalbard from 1925). The period is marked as the beginning of a trend which resulted in polar imperialism. Blom identifies Rolf Thommessen as a person promoting the agenda of bringing East Greenland into the Norwegian sphere of interests,⁵⁴ and Thommessen used his newspaper *Tidens Tegn* to put pressure on the Norwegian government as early as 1923–1924. This was in keeping with the policies promoted by a national lobby group working towards the goal of claiming East Greenland for Norway.⁵⁵ Later, Rolf Thommessen regarded and used polar matters as a means to unify the conservatives on a policy of Norwegian expansion into East Greenland. This was part of a larger scheme intended to fight the perceived threat of

⁵² Skagestad, Odd Gunnar. *Norsk Polarpolitikk Hovedtrekk og utviklingslinjer 1905–1974*. Oslo: Dreyer Forlag, 1975. 17.

⁵³ Skagestad. *Norsk Polarpolitikk*. 1975. 39–40.

⁵⁴ Blom *Kampen om Eirik Raudes Land*. 1973. 206.

⁵⁵ Blom *Kampen om Eirik Raudes Land*. 1973. 206.

socialism.⁵⁶ Rolf Thommessen was the man who helped Roald Amundsen organize his most spectacular expeditions. Did he use Amundsen to front his own agendas?

It was not just the Norwegian government that may have seen Roald Amundsen as a resource to be used to further its own agenda. The Italian government, led by the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, used the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Expedition to further Fascist Italy. This is another area where Rolf Thommessen was influential, as he sympathized with Fascist ideals and goals, notably as the Carlylean strong man.

As the expeditions became increasingly dependent on advanced and manpower-intensive technology, Amundsen became less and less of a critical factor to the completion of his expeditions. The introduction of the airplane and airship in exploration was in many ways the realization of a dream for explorers, as manual labour could be substituted with a flying machine. Roald Amundsen was among the first explorers to see a practical use for the airplane in exploring the Arctic, but he was not the first to attempt to use an airplane or airship to reach his goals. The airplane was a relative novelty when Roald Amundsen began the *Maud* expedition, but due to advances in mechanical engineering and aeronautics made during the First World War, new airplanes came at a rapid pace and records in both endurance and speed were frequently broken.

Reflections on the sources in light of theory and method

Ottar Dahl states in his *Grunntrekk i historieforskningens metodelære* that all sources can lie or be wrong, and that the truth can lie hidden in sources that are deemed less than credible.⁵⁷ Knut Kjelstadli states in his work *Fortida er ikke hva den engang var* that there is no way to absolutely determine if a source is credible or not; it is an art where one uses knowledge of time, place, environment and intuition to make a conscious decision.⁵⁸ Ingar Kaldal states in *Historisk forskning, forståing og forteljning* that most historians write their accounts based on a mosaic of sources that are "more or less" credible, and that it is unreasonable to demand that all sources should be undeniably reliable.⁵⁹ The authors are adamant that one should, when available, use primary sources, primary meaning close in time, place and person. They are

⁵⁶ Blom *Kampen om Eirik Raudes Land*. 1973. 326.

⁵⁷ Dahl, Ottar. *Grunntrekk i historieforskningens metodelære*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1967. 69.

⁵⁸ Kjelstadli, Knut. *Fortid er ikke hva den engang var*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1999. 181.

⁵⁹ Kaldal, Ingar. *Historisk forskning, forståing og forteljning*. Oslo: Det Norske samlaget, 2003. 91-92.

equally adamant that one has to evaluate the source and make up one's mind as to its credibility. Dahl gives rules and principles, Kjelstadli rules of thumb, and Kaldal offers advice. Whenever one works with sources, it comes down to the researcher's judgement of reliability. Most of the material used here consists of articles, satire, accounts, unpublished material and literature. Some appear reliable, others appear less so and some may even be biased.

Behan McCullagh writes in his article "Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation and Explanation" that there are four basic ways to become biased. First, one can misinterpret evidence. Second, an account may omit significant facts on the subject that makes it unbalanced. Third, a general description of the past can imply facts that are known to be false. Fourth, causal explanations can be used with the intent to somewhat mislead the reader.⁶⁰ McCullagh states that: "Biased descriptions are often unjust, presenting a one-sided impression of their subject that accords with the historian's interest."⁶¹ He writes that bias may be unavoidable in history, as historians use concepts to describe, select evidence to support, and use words to present their interest.⁶² McCullagh continues to state that those who look for support for their hypotheses, carefully and deliberately subject the outcome to critical evaluation.⁶³ Personal bias can be overcome by committing to the standards of rational historical inquiry.⁶⁴ Bias is deplorable, he states, and he continues by stating that historians have a "social responsibility to produce fair descriptions and explanations (...)."⁶⁵ Ottar Dahl writes in his article "Bruk og misbruk av historie"⁶⁶ that the main difference between use and abuse of history is motive.⁶⁷ Dahl also states that the primary objective of a scientist is to find the truth,⁶⁸ and that the values of writers of history are reflected in their choice of topic, subject, thesis and narration.⁶⁹ Use or abuse of history, claims Dahl, is determined by vague and varying criteria. He states that use is argumentation to further a purpose, while abuse is flawed argumentation, often combined with a negative evaluation of the purpose or result.⁷⁰ The problem of abuse and bias does not decrease when one takes the basic understanding of

⁶⁰ McCullagh, C. Behan. "Bias in historical description, interpretation, and explanation" in *History and Theory* 39 (1) 2000. 40.

⁶¹ McCullagh. *History and Theory*. 2000. 50.

⁶² McCullagh. *History and Theory*. 2000. 52.

⁶³ McCullagh. *History and Theory*. 2000. 57.

⁶⁴ McCullagh. *History and Theory*. 2000. 59.

⁶⁵ McCullagh. *History and Theory*. 2000. 65.

⁶⁶ Dahl, Ottar. *Historie og Teori, artikler 1975–2001*. Oslo: Unipub forlag, 2004.

⁶⁷ Dahl. *Historie og Teori*. 2004. 201.

⁶⁸ Dahl. *Historie og Teori*. 2004. 202.

⁶⁹ Dahl. *Historie og Teori*. 2004. 202.

⁷⁰ Dahl. *Historie og Teori*. 2004. 205.

hermeneutics into account; that the sources influence the author just as much as the author uses the source to further his own understanding and account. In this case, a biased source can influence the author to become biased himself. McCullagh states that the way to be the least biased in a narrative appears to be to use several different narratives, debate them, see them from many perspectives and come to a conclusion.⁷¹ All mentioned markers for bias or abuse can in some way or another be held against the material used in the thesis, but it is still material that can be used with care and due reflection.

I have used Leon Amundsen's archive related to Roald Amundsen. Leon was Amundsen's brother, and he was responsible for the administrative and economic parts of the *Maud* expedition until 1922. In 1922, Roald Amundsen began his cooperation with the Danish-American Hakon H. Hammer, which lasted until 1924, when Amundsen dismissed Hammer for having committed fraud.⁷²

From 1924 to 1926, Rolf Thommessen of NLF was responsible for the economic and administrative parts of Roald Amundsen's expeditions. Rolf Thommessen's account became part of a litigation case against Roald Amundsen, claiming that Amundsen had breached his contract. As such, Thommessen's account has to be viewed as anti-Amundsen, and coloured by his own agenda. At the same time, the account shows considerable insight into both the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight and the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight, and this insight can be confirmed from other sources. It is a controversial source, as it has a lengthy internal logic, which Dahl states may be seen as a sign of an intelligently constructed lie,⁷³ making the account less credible. And there are indeed signs that there is something not quite right with the account. There are indications that point to the account having been written with the agenda of proving that Roald Amundsen had broken his contract with NLF more than informing the court of Thommessen's objective view. Some things are false and some things appear true in the account. It has been used as a source with the above-mentioned facts in mind. Although one has to bear in mind the words of Dahl, there might be some truth in an unlikely source as well.

Unpublished material from Norsk Luftseiladsforening's archives has also been used. The NLF organized and administered the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight and the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. The archive in itself is extensive, but weak. There are

⁷¹ McCullagh. *History and Theory*. 2000. 54.

⁷² Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 328, 352.

⁷³ Dahl. *Grunntrekk i historieforskningens metodelære*. 1967. 70.

few signed contracts. The contract issue is important to the understanding of the problems that arose after the expedition. As it is, there are piles of drafts for contracts, but very few signed ones. The more one investigates the issue, the more it becomes clear that finding the truth with regards to the contracts might be an impossible task. One has to make up one's mind and decide what may have been probable. Statements of income are also rare. These are mostly found in correspondence with contracts attached, but this is mostly for international sources of income. Norwegian sources of income are missing. In the archive, there are no actual books that show income and expenses, and only one accountant report, which was very critical to how the NLF conducted its business. There are many sources that show estimates of possible income, some of which are speculative to the point of absurdity. As it is, the archive does have its use, as the correspondence found there gives the impression that there is more cooperation between the expeditions of Roald Amundsen and the Norwegian government than is immediately apparent in most literature.

The last reflection is on people. Roald Amundsen, as a human, has been left out of the thesis, as he was and remains difficult to grasp in short statements and characteristics. When Roald Amundsen is mentioned, it is to denote his image, as a heroic figure and a national symbol. Rolf Thommessen is a particular problem as he, as a person, is universally condemned in modern literature as a traitor because of his sympathy and cooperation with Fascists in light of the Second World War. It is important to remember that in the contemporary world, he was both a respected and important member of society. He was the editor of one of the most popular and circulated newspapers in Norway, and his thoughts and ideas were considered outspoken, but not uncommon. His views and actions during the decade leading up to the Second World War are not included in this master thesis.

2

The *Maud* Expedition(s)

“And then “*Maud*” passes into the fairy tale, as the polar night slowly descends on the ship and its brave men. But the knowledge that the thoughts and hope of an entire people accompany them, will make the loneliness and hardship easier to endure.”⁷⁴

The *Maud* expedition is the foundation on which this thesis bases its investigation of Roald Amundsen’s expeditions. As such it needs to be defined, explained and placed in a historical context. *Maud* has been labeled as a single expedition and has been treated as such in the press and amongst historians. On closer inspection, such a view is misleading. The expedition lasted from 1918 to 1925, seven years, and during that time there were several changes to the expedition. There was a change of command as Roald Amundsen abandoned the expedition, leaving his second in command, Oscar Wisting, in charge. There was a change of crew on more than one occasion, and the expedition was repeatedly abandoned and re-launched. As a result, the single expedition perspective benefits from being separated into different phases. In order to clarify the long and confusing expedition for myself, I have used a chronological order to the four various phases of the expedition. The journey through the Northeast Passage is *Maud*, phase A. The re-launch from Nome (Alaska) in August 1920 is *Maud*, phase B. The re-launch from Seattle in June 1922 is *Maud*, phase C. Finally there is the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight, which was supposed to be an independent sub-unit of *Maud*, phase C.

The *Maud* Expedition, phase A

The first part of the *Maud* expedition, phase A, is the journey that eventually succeeded in traversing the Northeast Passage. Prior to the launch of the *Maud* expedition, Phase A, there was some interest in Amundsen and his new expedition in the media, notably *Aftenposten*.

⁷⁴ Not signed. ”Foran starten af Roald Amundsen Nordpols ekspedition. Mandskabet samlet. –”Maud” er snart seilklare. Fra et besøg ombord.” *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No. 308. Sunday, 23 June 1918. Author’s translation.

This newspaper devoted a full front page and several pages inside the paper to an extensive account of Roald Amundsen's preparations for the expedition. Amundsen was described as an easy-going, lovable, quick and handsome person. He explained that everyone had been amiable towards him, and that there had been no trouble in getting the necessary equipment or seven years' worth of food, despite the current rationing regime due to the First World War. He summed it all up rather optimistically, saying that his ship was a "tip top vessel".⁷⁵ Amundsen was not alone in being interviewed before the launch. The director of the meteorological observatory in Bergen, Birkeland, was also interviewed.⁷⁶ He was supposed to participate, but his position was dropped in favour of Harald Ulrik Sverdrup. Birkeland described some of the experiments and science that was to be conducted aboard *Maud*. The tone of this interview was businesslike, but Birkeland was described favourably.⁷⁷ Another item of interest was a renewed focus on polar postcards. In an earlier attempt to launch a North Pole expedition, postcards had been printed and sold to be taken to the North Pole and back, as a collectors' item. These had been preserved, and the rest of the prints were prior to the launch on sale in the newsdesks at *Aftenposten*, *Morgenbladet*, *Morgenposten* and *Tidens Tegn*. These newspapers appeared to be interested in selling the postcards to support the *Maud* expedition.⁷⁸ *Maud* had been made into a floating post-office, and one hoped that it would turn out to be the northernmost in the world of its kind.⁷⁹ The last big interview was a three-page affair in *Aftenposten*, starting on the front page. Here Amundsen, the crew, the supplies and the ship were praised as the finest that Norway had to offer – the sum of Norwegian shipping traditions, all worthy of their task. The cost of the expedition was one million kroner. One tenth came from private donors, while two tenths, NOK 200,000, had been awarded by the Storting in 1917. These funds were awarded with an overwhelming majority, as only eight members of the Storting voted against.⁸⁰ The rest came from Amundsen himself. *Aftenposten* was especially interested in the supplies. They made a point of how there was no rationing aboard *Maud*. Special treats such as tobacco and chocolate had been donated by Norwegian manufacturers. There was also alcohol aboard, which was prohibited in Norway at the time,

⁷⁵ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen om sin reise og Nordpolsfærden." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No. 265. Friday, 31 May 1918.

⁷⁶ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen om sin reise og Nordpolsfærden." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No. 265. Friday, 31 May 1918.

⁷⁷ Not signed. "Direktør Birkeland om Nordpols-ekspedisjonen. Specialtelegram." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No 275. Wednesday, 5 June 1918.

⁷⁸ Not Signed. "Brevkort fra Nordpolen." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No. 282. Sunday, 9 June 1918.

⁷⁹ Not Signed. "Verdens nordligste postkontor." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No 285. Tuesday, 11 June 1918.

⁸⁰ Kongeriket Norges seksogsekstiende ordentlige Stortingsforhandlinger 1917. 6a / 6b. Insst. S. Nr. 131, 14 April 1917.

and Amundsen emphasised how there would be no prohibition aboard. Amundsen even hinted to his faith in flying, and the new way of exploring, when he claimed that *Maud* was supposed to bring along airplanes and flying kites, but that these had had to be left behind due to lack of space.⁸¹ *Aftenposten* was the newspaper that had the most interest in Roald Amundsen's launch. *Dagbladet*, on the other hand, did not bother to make his departure front page news, and reserved their interviews for page 3.⁸² Both papers stated that the scientific study of the air and seas in the Arctic was the primary concern and that the Pole merely was a secondary goal, but "Amundsen will probably not let the pole drift by without planting the Norwegian flag on it."⁸³

Maud left Kristiania on 25 June 1918. The departure was kept secret, and only a handful of relatives were present to wave their goodbyes. A few soldiers from the Royal Guard happened to pass by and waved enthusiastically and cheered. None had been told, not even the press, which had been left in the dark.⁸⁴ There were considerably more festivities as *Maud* sailed along the Norwegian coast. At Stoksund, salutes were fired, flags were raised, and people hailed the ship.⁸⁵ Similar reports from along the coast tell the same story. People seemed proud of a new expedition that would cause glory for Norway. As *Maud* left Vardø⁸⁶ and Norway on 18 June 1918, people did not expect to hear anything from the expedition for years to come, as it sailed through distant waters.

Aftenposten was very positive towards the Amundsen expedition during this pre-phase. News and descriptions had a positive, even benign tone. Even the comic press was positive. The magazine *Karikaturen* included the expedition in a song, describing the members as brave and handsome, and the expedition as a means to get a legal drink.⁸⁷ Its competitor, *Hvepsen*, was equally enthusiastic, including in a song a verse dedicated to praising the expedition and Amundsen. They wrote of a man who sought new harbours, leaving civilization and summer in favour of winter and the Pole. Amundsen was hailed as a brave man, and his ship, named

⁸¹ Not signed. "Foran starten af Roald Amundsens Nordpolsekspedition. Mandskabet samlet. – "Maud" er snart seilklar. Fra et besøg ombord." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No 308. Sunday, 23 June 1918.

⁸² Not signed. "Et besøk om bord i "Maud" " *Dagbladet*. Year 50. No 170. Sunday, 23 June 1918.

⁸³ Not signed. "Foran starten af Roald Amundsens Nordpolsekspedition. Mandskabet samlet. – "Maud" er snart seilklar. Fra et besøg ombord." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No 308. Sunday, 23 June 1918. 1.

⁸⁴ Not signed. " "Maud" stevner mod Nordpolen. En stille og ubemerket afreise fra Kristiania i formiddag." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No. 312. Tuesday, 25 June 1918.

⁸⁵ Not signed. "Polarskibet "Maud" passerede Stoksund lørdag." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No 339. Wednesday, 10 July 1918.

⁸⁶ Newspapers say Vardø, other sources say Vadsø. Not signed. " "Maud" i Vardø." *Aftenposten*. Year 59. No 356. Friday, 19 July 1918.

⁸⁷ Sancho. "Offensiv vise, melodi av cassanova." *Karikaturen*. Year 02. No 27. Wednesday, 10 July 1918.

after the Norwegian queen, was described as a treasure trove of food and drink, sailing under the Norwegian flag; they sought to serve their motherland.⁸⁸ But everybody did not think that the patriotism was well-placed. In *Hvepsen*, Amundsen's expedition was also condemned as "Norwegian imperialism", and it was claimed that as Norway had recently become a member of the League of Nations, it apparently also had to "conquer what can be conquered", and that Norway was pursuing this course of action in order to be "mentioned as a world power".⁸⁹ This was a fairly accurate judgement of what was about to happen in Norwegian foreign policy. The *Maud* expedition's launch in 1918 coincided with the end of a Norwegian foreign policy that had focused on working quietly in the wings in order to probe the feasibility of Norway making a claim in the Arctic, a silent diplomatic agenda which had begun in 1908.⁹⁰ The claim was propelled by the numerous Norwegian private citizens who had interests in the area and who made it painfully clear that Norway also needed a policy on the Arctic in general and Spitsbergen in particular, if it was to make good on its claim for these areas to be controlled by Norway.⁹¹

After the initial news interest and well-wishes, *Maud* was not mentioned anywhere until 1919, when one article on the *Maud* expedition was printed. It was a front-page report from a stopover at a Russian radio outpost at Dickson Island.⁹² That was the first and last news from the expedition as it was en route, and the author had a positive outlook. It ended with praise of Amundsen as an experienced sailor who knew most of the Arctic, and would lead the expedition to a happy conclusion.⁹³

The Norwegian government took political steps to acquire Spitsbergen, and so 1919 marks the introduction of a new type of Norwegian foreign policy, the expansion into the Arctic.⁹⁴

Roald Berg states that there was a wish in Norway to expand into territory that was viewed as *Terra Nullus*, or no man's land.⁹⁵ Before 1919, the Norwegian policy had been to secure the country's economic interests on Spitsbergen, but the work to acquire the archipelago came to

⁸⁸ Not signed. "Fra vore korrespondenter. Iltelefonen til "Hvepsen"". *Hvepsen*. Year 13. No 27. Saturday, 13 July 1918.

⁸⁹ Kristen Gundelach. "Norsk Imperialisme". *Hvepsen*. Year 13. No 29. Saturday 27 July 1918.

⁹⁰ Skagestad, Odd Gunnar. *Norsk Polarpolitikk*. Oslo: Dreyer forlag, 1973. 25–39.

⁹¹ Skagestad, *Norsk Polarpolitikk*. 1973. 26–27.

⁹² Dr. L. Breidfuss. "De siste etterretninger fra Roald Amundsens Maud-ekspedition." *Aftenposten*. Year 60. No 160. Friday, 29 March 1919.

⁹³ Dr. L. Breidfuss. "De siste etterretninger fra Roald Amundsens Maud-ekspedition." *Aftenposten*. Year 60. No 160. Friday, 29 March 1919.

⁹⁴ Skagestad. *Norsk Polarpolitikk*. 1975. 40.

⁹⁵ Berg, Roald. "Territoriell ekspansjonspolitik" in Odd Bjørn Fure (ed). *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie* Volume 3. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996. 109.

a halt due to the First World War.⁹⁶ After the war, the Norwegian government became actively involved in the work to claim Spitsbergen, and a treaty giving Norway superiority over the Archipelago was signed in 1920.⁹⁷

During 1919, Godfred Hansen, a Danish naval captain, led an expedition to Thule, Greenland to build a depot for the *Maud* expedition, as it was expected to arrive near Greenland after following the ocean currents over the North Pole.⁹⁸ The depot was set up in order to make sure that the expedition had sufficient supplies to be able to complete the journey back to Norway. The Storting granted funds, unanimously and without debate, for the expedition, which was proposed by Knud Rasmussen and led by Godfred Hansen. Leon Amundsen, Roald Amundsen's brother, wrote a narrative on this matter in a letter, detailing where the depots were located.⁹⁹

The first news that came directly from the *Maud* expedition was a telegram that arrived in Kristiania on the morning of 7 April 1920.¹⁰⁰ At this stage, interest in the expedition seemed to have cooled, as the news from the expedition did not make the front page. It was treated as any other article. In the telegram, Amundsen asked what route Peter L. Tessem and Paul Knutsen had taken back to the civilized world after they had left *Maud*. They left the expedition to deliver mail, it was a chance for Amundsen to send home Tessem and Knutsen was sent with him as a companion.¹⁰¹

Aftenposten mistakenly reported that the men had left the ship in 1918, during the first winter.¹⁰² In fact, they had left in early autumn the following year, on 4 September 1919.¹⁰³ It was now 1920, and no one had known that Tessem and Knutsen had left *Maud*, and even less was known of their status or position. The telegram was the beginning of a mystery that still lingers; what happened to Tessem and Knutsen? Two rescue operations were launched to look for them. Neither expedition had any hope of finding them alive, but the goal was to discover

⁹⁶ Berg, Roald. "Ekspansjon inn i det Norske hav" in Roald Berg (ed) *Norge på egen hånd 1905–1920*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995. 172–173.

⁹⁷ Berg, Roald. "'Svalbard for Norge'" in Roald Berg (ed) *Norge på egen hånd 1905–1920*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget. 1995. 287.

⁹⁸ Not signed. "Roald Amundsens ekspedition. Kaptein Gotfred Hansen vil lede hjelpeekspeditionen." *Aftenposten*. Year 60. No 213. Tuesday, 2 May 1919.

⁹⁹ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Amundsen, Leon til Amundsen, Roald, letter from Leon to Roald Amundsen, dated 13 August 1919.

¹⁰⁰ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Amundsen, Roald til Amundsen, Leon: Telegram from Roald to Leon Amundsen, dated 29 March 1920. The telegram took some time to arrive, and the news did not break until 7 April.

¹⁰¹ Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 267.

¹⁰² Not signed. "Efterretningene fra Roald Amundsen. Leon Amundsen vil indhente bekræftelse paa telegrammet fra Washington." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 170. Wednesday, 7 April 1920.

¹⁰³ Amundsen, *Nordostpassagen*, 1921. 207–208.

their fate. The first expedition, the Begitchev expedition, found the burned remains of a human, along with shell casings of Norwegian origin. The shells were issued by the Norwegian army, from which Amundsen himself had borrowed all the weapons and ammunition for the expedition.¹⁰⁴ The expedition concluded that one of the participants burned the remains of the other in order to keep wild animals away. The ashes from the fireplace were buried.¹⁰⁵ The second expedition, the Urvantzeff expedition, found the remains of the second member. His remains were found within sight of the radio outpost at Dickson Island. The expedition concluded, by investigating the origins of a gold watch and a wedding ring, that the person was Tessem. The expedition then speculated that he had slipped, been knocked unconscious and had died of exposure to the extreme weather. The speculation was based on what they found around the remains of the body.¹⁰⁶ Based on the findings of the Urvantzeff expedition, it seems probable that the burned human remains found by the Begitchev expedition was Knutsen, and that the body found near the Dickson Island radio station was Tessem. The newspaper stories written on these two unfortunate members of the *Maud* expedition did not commit to any finger-pointing, as it seems that both history and the press thinks it all was the result of bad luck.

As the news of the Tessem and Knutsen disappearance surfaced, articles in the press were soon drawn and focused on the fact that the *Maud* expedition, phase A was on its way to Nome, not the North Pole. A telegram arrived in Kristiania, stating that Amundsen would be in Nome in June 1920. This was met with puzzlement. Speculation on why the expedition was returning to civilization rather than staying in isolation ran rife. Did they need more crew? Did they need more food? Did they need more fuel? Or send mail? Everyone who had anything to do with polar matters were called in and asked questions. Amundsen's choices were compared to his stunt in 1910, when he turned his North Pole drift into a race for the South Pole.¹⁰⁷ Was this something similar, a stunt to conquer the Northeast Passage? *Aftenposten* kept a positive spin on the Northeast Passage story and chose to focus on the

¹⁰⁴ NBO: Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Arméen – luftfartsrådet. Letter from NLF to Det kgl. Forsvarsdepartement, dated 10. February 1926. Complaint that weapons borrowed to *Maud* had not been returned, and that no further weapons would be lent before all were returned.

¹⁰⁵ Not signed. "Resultatene af den russiske hjælpeekspedition efter Tessem og Knutsen". *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 629. Friday, 30 Desember 1921.

¹⁰⁶ N.N. Urvantzeff. "Det er Roald Amundsens beretning, som er fundet ved Dickson-øen." *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 079. Tuesday, 13 February 1923; See also official account: NBO Brevs 812 2d: uregistrert korrespondanse, departement: Utenriksdepartementet 1914–1924: Letter to Leon Amundsen, from Det kongelige Utenriksdepartement with attached official report, dated 10 February 1923.

¹⁰⁷ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen paa vei til Nome i Alaska! Han gennemfører Nordøstpassagen". *Aftenpsoten* year 61. No 168. Thursday, 22 April 1920.

honour gained for Norway, viewing this as another page in the book of Norwegian polar deeds. But as there was no further news from the *Maud* expedition, speculation continued. Polar experts were regularly being asked what they thought of the cryptic telegram from *Maud*. Norwegian experts were not keen on commenting,¹⁰⁸ so *Aftenposten* went abroad and sought out more talkative experts elsewhere in Scandinavia. They commented that Amundsen might have to abandon his expedition and re-launch it from Nome.¹⁰⁹ *Aftenposten* then received news that the expedition was dissolving, and that Amundsen planned to abandon the expedition. This was denied by Leon Amundsen.¹¹⁰ *Dagbladet* also printed a similar story, and this too was denied by Leon Amundsen.¹¹¹

In *Aftenposten*, Roald Amundsen's "official" account was printed with an abridged description of what had happened during the expedition, up to the present. The paper's following shift in attitude was phenomenal. Gone was all doubt and hearsay. It turned patriotic and romantic, almost naïve, in the description of the *Maud* expedition in general and Amundsen in particular. On the prospect of sailing into the ice for another five years, *Aftenposten* wrote the following: "A holy fire burns in the man, and in the men who of their own free will follow him, and who know perfectly well what they have ahead of them (...)." ¹¹² and continued by stating that: "His and his men's honour is the nation's honour." ¹¹³ The fact that two crewmembers had left the expedition in order to deliver mail and then disappeared was not mentioned. Some might have been disapproving the lack of consideration for Tessem and Knutsen and some may have questioned that the expedition had come to America instead of the North Pole, but such views were not printed nor recognized.¹¹⁴ The official story, written by Amundsen and the other contributors to the book *Nordostpassasjen* (Northeast Passage), painted a picture of an expedition that had bad luck, but which was united. Tor Bomann-Larsen, on the other hand, has a more detailed account of the mental

¹⁰⁸ Not signed. "Professor Helland Hansen om Amundsens planer." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 201. Friday, 23 April 1920.

¹⁰⁹ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen. En udtalelse af den danske polarforsker Einar Mikkelsen." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 207. Tuesday, 27 April 1920.

¹¹⁰ Not signed. "Opgiver Roald Amundsen sin Nordpolekspedition?" *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 208. Tuesday, 27 April 1920.

¹¹¹ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen opgir sin Nordpolekspedisjon." *Dagbladet*. Year 52. No 97. Tuesday, 27 April 1920.

¹¹² Not signed. "Roald Amundsen vil –trods alt løse "Maud"-ekspeditionens store opgave. Nordøstpassagen gennemføres. – Nordpolen er nu maalet." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 216. Saturday, 1 May 1920. 1. Author's translation.

¹¹³ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen vil –trods alt løse "Maud"-ekspeditionens store opgave. Nordøstpassagen gennemføres. – Nordpolen er nu maalet." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 216. Saturday, 1 May 1920. 1. Author's translation.

¹¹⁴ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen vil –trods alt- løse "Maud"-ekspeditionens store opgave. Nordøstpassagen gennemføres. – Nordpolen er nu maalet." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 216. Saturday, 1 May 1920.

state of Amundsen and his crew. It was not a happy ship.¹¹⁵ Alexander Wisting attribute this unhappiness and in a way the failure of the expedition to vitamin A poisoning due to all the bear meat they ate during the expedition, which allegedly explains the symptoms of illness, depression and aggression that the crew suffered from.¹¹⁶ The definite truth remains unknown. In Norway, the positive aspects of what happened during the expedition became published in the book *Nordostpassagen* (The Northeast Passage). In line with Roald Amundsen's way of writing, it was a happy account on the highlights of the expedition, downplaying the hardships and emphasizing their achievements. The income from this book benefited neither the expedition nor Roald Amundsen himself, but was made out to his family.¹¹⁷

Maud, phase A was popular in the press. Although there is no proof that *Aftenposten* or other newspapers purchased news from Leon or Roald Amundsen, *Aftenposten* was predominantly positive. When *Maud* reached Nome, a majority of the crew abandoned the expedition.¹¹⁸ Not all the crewmembers that left *Maud* were treated fairly. As they left the ship, some had to fend for themselves. The only work to be found in Nome was in the local gold mines, and they had to work there until they could pay the boat fare back to Norway themselves. One member of the expedition had to sell his clothing to afford the ticket home. When these members of the expedition came back to Norway, Roald Amundsen's brother, Leon was there to meet them. He debriefed the expedition members before they talked to the press. In the press they have nothing but good to say on Amundsen.¹¹⁹ When one member of the expedition did go to the media, it was two years later, and then he told the story of Nome and the gold digging industry. That the crewmembers had been working in the mines remained a secret.¹²⁰ This fact might have been kept secret in order to make sure the public image of Roald Amundsen remained untarnished. Tor Bomann-Larsen claims that the members who left the expedition were, in Amundsen's view, "traitors" who should be sent home and forgotten.¹²¹ The *Maud* crew returned home, and there was no public scandal on their treatment, as both the expedition participants and the media apparently were interested in retaining cordial terms with Amundsen.

¹¹⁵ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 279. 276-281.

¹¹⁶ Wisting, Alexander. *Roald Amundsen. Det største eventyret*. Oslo: Kagge forlag, 2011. 334. 331-335.

¹¹⁷ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 268.

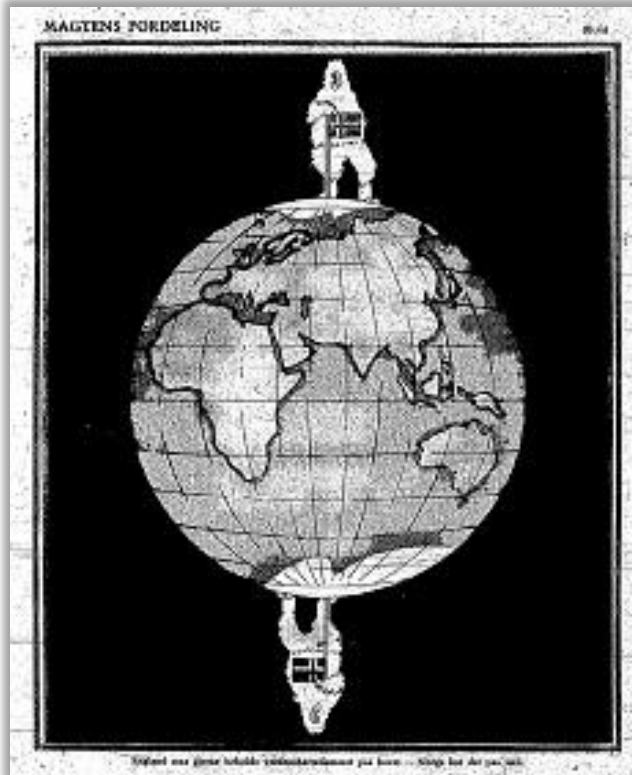
¹¹⁸ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 278-279.

¹¹⁹ Not signed. "Maud"-ekspeditionen. De tre hjemvendte udtaler sig til "Aftenposten". *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 504. Tuesday, 12 October 1920.

¹²⁰ Not signed. "Byen som gullgravningen gjorde rig – og fattig." *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 313. Friday, 23 June 1922.

¹²¹ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 278.

The comic press were both supportive and critical towards the *Maud* expedition. The comic press magazine *Exlex* did “report” that the pole was reached in 1919, with a caricature that has become a symbol of the polar nation of Norway.



The drawing, by Ragnvald Blix, was titled *Magtens Fordeling* (The Distribution of Power), and states that “England can keep their world supremacy at sea, Norway has one in the ice”.¹²² When *Maud* reached America, the comic press was quick to point out that they considered it a scam that Leon Amundsen sold “old news” to the media in Kristiania. America had already been discovered.¹²³ Later the magazine claimed in a song on Otto Sverdrup that “Roald” could have spared himself this polar trip, as there was debate on whether he would ever reach the Pole, or

if he would “do as Nansen did” and come home with empty pockets.¹²⁴

Despite the attacks made by the comic press, the media coverage had a mostly positive angle on Amundsen and *Maud*, Phase A. There was, however, a peculiar difference between *Aftenposten* and *Dagbladet*’s coverage when it was feared that the expedition was dissolving and that Amundsen was possibly on his way home in shame. *Aftenposten* asked a question while *Dagbladet* made a statement. When definite and signed news arrived, the patriotism was overwhelming. The comic press did criticize Amundsen on topics that were absent in the press, such as his inability to reach the Pole and deliver the promised results. The newspapers were enthusiastic, and there was some criticism from *Hvepsen*.

Aboard the *Maud* expedition, phase A was Harald Ulrik Sverdrup, the expedition’s chief scientist. During the voyage through the Northeast Passage, he and the crew of *Maud*

¹²² Not signed. “Mod Nordpolen med Maud” *Exlex*. Year 1. No 3. Wednesday, 26 February 1919. Drawing by Ragnvald Blix same issue.

¹²³ Kristianenser. “Fra min dagbok” *Karikaturen*. Year 4. No 18. Wednesday, 18 May 1920.

¹²⁴ Søren. “Hos Otto Sverdrup”. *Karikaturen*. Year 4. No 28. Wednesday, 28 July 1920.

conducted experiments on earth-magnetism, atmospheric-electricity, weather conditions on the surface and in the air, oceanographic conditions and whatever else that “may have been of interest.”¹²⁵ Sverdrup also conducted ethnographic studies on the local population.¹²⁶ In essence, his work was done in a scientific fashion, with a scientific mind and with research and increased knowledge as his motivation. Harald Dag Jølle writes extensively on the ethnographic studies of Harald Sverdrup, who travelled with Arctic Intuits in order to study them as a scientist.¹²⁷ When it was processed years later, his work was considered important.¹²⁸ Sverdrup and his work was the most successful aspect of this expedition phase, and relate the *Maud* expedition to science.

The *Maud* Expedition, phase B

While the newspapers in Norway reported hearsay on what Amundsen might or might not have done and praised him, news arrived stating that Amundsen had left Nome on 8 August 1920 for the unknown, expecting to return to civilization five years later.¹²⁹ That was the first news from and the beginning of the *Maud* expedition, phase B. *Aftenposten* appears to have expected news from the expedition, but apparently not that Amundsen was leaving Alaska for the Pole so soon. It was only after he had left Nome that news on what happened surfaced. *Aftenposten* reported that most of the crew had left the expedition, apart from Oscar Wisting, Harald Ulrik Sverdrup and Gennady Olonkin. *Aftenposten* claimed that “(...) there is no reason to believe that Amundsen, among the thousands of Norwegian and Swedish men in Nome, has not found those people he needs to accomplish his coming task.”¹³⁰ Amundsen left with a mostly Inuit crew, apart from those who had not left the ship. In November 1920, Amundsen wrote to the media of his new Inuit crew. He claims that he hired them because the other applicants were too expensive, as they wanted three hundred dollars a month, and were “incompetent”. An Inuit crew were cheaper. One of them, Mary, he claimed to be clean, a

¹²⁵ Friedman, Robert Marc, “Nansenismen” in Harald Dag Jølle, Einar-Arne Drivnes (eds), *Norsk Polarhistorie II Vitenskapene*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 2004. 151.

¹²⁶ Friedman. *Norsk Polarhistorie II* 2004. 151.

¹²⁷ Jølle, Harald Dag “Nordpolens Naboer” in Harald Dag Jølle, Einar-Arne Drivnes (eds), *Norsk Polarhistorie II Vitenskapene*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 2004. 283.

¹²⁸ Jølle. *Norsk Polarhistorie II*, 2004. 285–286.

¹²⁹ Not signed. “Roald Amundsen drog igaar fra Nome ud paa sin nye polfærd.” *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 386. Saturday, 7 August 1920.

¹³⁰ Not signed. “Aftenpostens telegram fra Roald Amundsen før starten. Helmer Hansen, Rønne og Sundbeck paa vei hjem. Hverken post eller varer naaede frem til ”Maud” før afreisen.” *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 391. Wednesday, 11 September 1920.

good cook and an excellent seamstress.¹³¹ The news that a woman was aboard prompted *Hvepsen* to print a caricature of Amundsen as an alcoholised womanizer.



What concerned the paper was that Amundsen had not waited for the mail, goods, food and papers he had ordered from Norway, but left Nome for the Arctic before any goods had arrived. The newspaper staff waited until some of the crew that left the expedition returned to Norway before they made inquiries into what was happening to the expedition. Amundsen, on the other hand, was on his way north. On 27 August 1920, the expedition reached Cape Serge, where they had to make

camp due to unfavourable ice conditions. At 6 September, news arrived in Norway that *Maud* was actually locked in the ice.¹³² In *Aftenposten*, speculation flourished on whether Amundsen would have to abort his expedition or not.¹³³ Amundsen managed to send word with a passing ship that *Maud* was stranded in the pack-ice and that the ship had survived ice pressing.¹³⁴ *Maud* spent the winter at Cape Serdtse-Kamen,¹³⁵ located at 76° north. *Dagbladet* summed up all these news in June 1921.¹³⁶ *Maud* managed to get out of the ice, and with damaged propellers the expedition was able to limp back to port. In June 1921 Amundsen was back in Nome, and the *Maud* was towed to Seattle in August 1921. The expedition needed to be properly refurbished, as the ship was worn by the ice and the propellers had to be replaced.

Amundsen sent a telegram to the Norwegian Storting asking for NOK 300,000 to fund the refitting of *Maud* and continue the voyage to the North Pole. As *Aftenposten* writes, the fate of the *Maud* expedition was in the hands of the Storting. They were to decide whether the *Maud* expedition would be abandoned or continue as a Norwegian expedition.¹³⁷ The Norwegian Storting did indeed want to keep the *Maud* expedition in the sphere of Norwegian affairs. It had already, behind closed doors, proposed to set aside NOK 500,000 for the

¹³¹ Not signed. "Et nyt telegram fra Roald Amundsen til "Aftenposten" ". *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 557. Thursday, 11 November 1920.

¹³² Not signed. " "Maud" allerede frosset fast i isen." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 462. Saturday, 18 September.

¹³³ Not signed. "Maa Amundsen opgive sin Nordpolsekspedition?" *Aftenposten*. Year 61. Monday, 20 September.

¹³⁴ Not signed. "En ny efterretning om Roald Amundsen." *Aftenposten*. Year 61. No 517. Tuesday, 19 October 1920.

¹³⁵ Bomann-Larsen, *Roald Amundsen*, 1995. 294.

¹³⁶ Not signed. "Roald Amundsens siste harde vinter." *Dagbladet*. Year 53. No 140. Tuesday, 21 June 1921.

¹³⁷ Not signed. "Roald Amundsen er vendt tilbake til Nome!" *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 285. Monday, 20 June 1921.

continuation of the expedition, which was NOK 200,000 more than Amundsen asked for. The Storting informed the public that they made the decision behind closed doors in order to give Amundsen “free reigns” and make sure that his hands were not bound by the wishes of the Storting,¹³⁸ where the funding had been approved by a unanimous vote.¹³⁹ *Aftenposten* voiced disappointment towards the fact that the expedition had been abandoned, but made sure that there was a positive twist on the material they printed. Both *Dagbladet* and the comic press presented contrasting views. *Dagbladet* raised criticism towards the expedition on the grounds that it had failed yet again, and appears to have been provoked by the Storting’s approval of funding Amundsen with NOK 500,000 behind closed doors.¹⁴⁰ In the 1920’s, Norway was beset by economic hardships, and this was seen as frivolous spending. Amundsen and his brother had not been informed in advance of the government’s generous offer. The funds were donated on 16 July 1921.¹⁴¹ These funds were mainly used to cover the refit of *Maud* and to



bring some crewmembers back to Norway after they left the expedition. The comic press magazine *Karikaturen* claimed that Amundsen should be made Minister of finance for his deeds, with reference to his apparent skill of acquiring money.¹⁴² Another caricature in *Karikaturen* shows Amundsen robbing Prime Minister Otto Bahr Halvorsen.¹⁴³ *Karikaturen* stated flatly that Amundsen found it difficult to find the North Pole, as the first time he went looking he found the South Pole, and the second time he found Alaska. So what would be next?¹⁴⁴

Roald Berg states that 1920 was the year when the Norwegian “wave” of Arctic expansion truly began. Until then, expansion had been confined to the acquisition of Spitsbergen, which was well underway.¹⁴⁵ Norway acquired limited control over Spitsbergen in 1920. It appears that a new goal was set as popular demand wanted the cabinet to look into the prospect of acquiring East-Greenland as well. Between 1921 and 1924, the Storting involved itself in this

¹³⁸ Not signed. “Den foreslaaede bevilgning til Roald Amundsen”. *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 305. Friday, 1 July 1921.

¹³⁹ Norges syttiende ordentlige stortingsforhandlinger 1921 6a (Innst. S. No 122, 30 June 1921), 7a /7b. 2753.

¹⁴⁰ Not signed. “Roald Amundsens Nordpolsfærd er atter blitt avbrutt. Han har fra Nome telegrafisk bedt stortinget om 300.000 kr.-og faar dem!” *Dagbladet*. Year 53. No 139. Monday, 20 June 1921.

¹⁴¹ NBO: Brevs 812: Leon Amundsens Arkiv vdr Roald Amundsen: 2d: Departementet (...) Letter from Kongelige Finans og Toll departement, J. Nr 2252 and 2957/1922C, no date.

¹⁴² Not signed. “Den nye regjering” *Karikaturen*. Year 5. No 44. Wednesday, 16 November 1921.

¹⁴³ Kristianenser “Fra min dagbok”. *Karikaturen*. Year 4. No 41. Wednesday, 27 October 1920.

¹⁴⁴ Kristianenser “Fra min dagbok”. *Karikaturen*. Year 4. No 41. Wednesday, 27 October 1920.

¹⁴⁵ Berg. *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie* 1996. 117.

debate.¹⁴⁶ Berg view the Storting's interest as a passing fancy, and that the goal of the cabinet was to focus on the new acquisition of Spitsbergen and the cabinets desire to consolidate, rather than the stortings wish to expand.¹⁴⁷

The funds from the Norwegian government were transferred directly to Amundsen's brother Leon.¹⁴⁸ Roald Amundsen left the *Maud* expedition in 1921, in an attempt to find a new way of making sure that the expedition reached the North Pole. In Seattle, *Maud* was refitted during the autumn of 1921 and into the new year of 1922, in preparation for *Maud*, Phase C.

The *Maud* Expedition, phase C

Amundsen left *Maud* to seek glory by other means, specifically by airplane, but he used *Maud* and the expedition as a transport vessel from Seattle to Nome. Amundsen was no longer *Maud*'s captain, as Oscar Wisting had replaced him.¹⁴⁹ Other new crew members included a new engine chief, Syvertsen, a new first mate, Hansen and the Siberian Chukchi Kakhot.¹⁵⁰ It was expected that *Maud*, phase C would be in the ice for five to seven years while they drifted across the North Pole and conducted scientific experiments. Gone was the scepticism that had been voiced when *Maud*, phase A and phase B had failed to achieve the goals set out. The media coverage was once again patriotic and hopeful.¹⁵¹ The restored *Maud* was equipped with a modern radio so they could hear what the world was saying and send messages of their own. This allowed for real-time communication with the outside world, which had not been possible previously. It also allowed for the expedition to have a new source of income, selling news from the expedition. Leon Amundsen had sold the news of the *Maud* expedition to four newspapers: *Aftenposten*, *Morgenbladet*, *Morgenposten*, and *Tidens Tegn*. The four papers would each quarter during *Maud*'s drift pay NOK 1,000 to receive exclusive news from the expedition.¹⁵² This showed that there was an interest in spending money on buying news from an Arctic expedition. The contracts, which were made public by the papers as boasts, were

¹⁴⁶ Berg. *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie* 1996. 117.

¹⁴⁷ Berg. *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie* 1996. 117

¹⁴⁸ NBO: Brevs 812: Leon Amundsens Arkiv vdr Roald Amundsen: 2d: Departementer (...) Letter from Kongelige Finans og Toll departement, J.Nr. 2252-2689 and 2769/1922C, dated 5 Desember 1922.

¹⁴⁹ Not signed. "Kapløbet mod Nordpolen. Roald Amundsen skal have en norsk flyver med paa sin Nordpols-færd." *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 373. Wednesday, 10 August 1921.

¹⁵⁰ Not signed. "Foran Roald Amundsen spændende start fra Point Barrow. Uafhængig af flyvefærden lader "Maud" sig fryse in i isen for sin 6-7 aars drift over Pol-bassinet." *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 319. Tuesday, 27 June 1922.

¹⁵¹ Not signed. "Foran Roald Amundsens spennende start fra Point Barrow" *Aftenpsoten*. Year 63. No 319. Monday, 27 June 1927.

¹⁵² NBO: Brevs 812: 2A: Contract between *Aftenposten*, *Morgenposten*, *Morgenbladet* and *Tidens Tegn* and Leon Amundsen, signed 8 November 1922.

thoroughly criticized by *Karikaturen*, who claimed that the newspapers in the capital had bought Roald Amundsen with:

(...) skin and bone and fountain pen. Everything he says and writes and thinks and dreams has been sold in advance (...) for a set amount for each word. So when one of these papers doesn't have anything to write, they just phone brother Leon and order a few meters of Roald.¹⁵³



Karikaturen claimed that this was a very practical arrangement, except for one thing: "Why is Roald writing up there in the ice? Would it not be cheaper and more convenient for all if he sat at Svartskog?"¹⁵⁴ The criticism of Roald Amundsen shows that there was awareness in the community of what was happening. Amundsen was in the tentative beginning of the cooperation between explorer and media, and people knew.

The *Maud* expedition also carried a scouting airplane, which according to Kåre Berg was the first airplane used for such a purpose in the Arctic.¹⁵⁵ This was a sensational addition to the expedition. Odd Dahl had been hired as pilot and in an interview, Dahl said that he was forbidden to talk about the expedition. But he was allowed to speak of flying in general terms. Dahl spoke of the relative ease of working in cold conditions, and claimed that ice and pack ice would no be more than a nuisance. He was more worried of engine failure, which he claimed to be relatively common.¹⁵⁶ Dahl was to realise that the polar ice was not an ideal area for airplanes, as a radio report from *Maud* confirms:

"(...) in the area we work, there is not a single natural landing strip which is 100 meters long, so an emergency landing is out of the question."¹⁵⁷ A later attempt to fly in the Arctic left the airplane in ruins

¹⁵³ Kristianenser. "Av min dagbok". *Karikaturen*. Year 6. No 36. Wednesday, 13 September 1922. Svartskog was the area where Roald Amundsen had his home, close to Nesodden outside Oslo.

¹⁵⁴ Kristianenser. "Av min dagbok". *Karikaturen*. Year 6. No 36. Wednesday, 13 September 1922.

¹⁵⁵ Berg, Kåre. *Polarheltene. Norske pionerer i Arktis og Antarktis*. Oslo: Andersen & Butenschøn forlag, 2003. 145.

¹⁵⁶ Not signed. "Nordpolsflyvere Odd Dahl og Oscar Omdal til Amerika." *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 544. Friday, 11 November 1921.

¹⁵⁷ Not signed. "Maud –ekspeditionens drift og skjæbne fra mars til igaar." *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 704. Tuesday, 4 desember 1923.

while both the pilot Dahl and the observer Wisting managed to leave the crash site unharmed. “(...) so the plans for a geographic study of from an airplane had to be abandoned.”¹⁵⁸

Sverdrup and a new addition, the Swedish meteorologist Finn Malmgren, was to continue the scientific work, and were able to set up a floating geophysical laboratory in the ice,¹⁵⁹ where they and the crew of *Maud* could study the Arctic while they drifted with the ice, hopefully to the North Pole.

The *Maud* expedition, phase C set off from Seattle on 4 June 1922, in the shadow of a local media frenzy over Amundsen's proposed plans to fly to the North Pole in the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight (see below). The plan was for *Maud* to sail into the ice, now with a new and motivated crew. The goal was the same as always, to reach the North Pole. *Maud*, phase C left the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight, consisting of Amundsen and his pilots, in Nome, and continued into the ice.¹⁶⁰ In the autumn of 1922, *Maud* froze into the ice near Wrangel Island, and began the drift. The news from *Maud*, phase C were sent by radio. In December 1922 they broadcast both their position and their drift pattern.¹⁶¹ During the winter, they drifted further north and reported that they found virtually no wildlife and expected to lose radio reception when the light season began.¹⁶² On 10 June 1923, the engineer aboard *Maud* died.¹⁶³ The ship reached 75 degrees north by Christmas.¹⁶⁴ In February 1924, it was reported that the ship drifted west rather than north, and concerns were voiced that the ship might collide with one of the islands in the Severnaja Zemlja archipelago.¹⁶⁵ At that time, Roald Amundsen was insolvent, and due to his bankruptcy, he could no longer afford the expedition. He sent a message to *Maud* and had them abort their polar drift. It was too late in the season for the expedition to attempt a breakout from the ice, so they had to stay another winter, into 1925, and then return to Seattle. When they arrived, the ship was confiscated by the local authorities in order to pay Amundsen's American creditors, and the crew was shipped home. "A bare half-dozen persons were at the dock to welcome the *Maud*, contrasting sharply to the 5,000 who bade the vessel and captain

¹⁵⁸ Not signed. "Maud-ekspeditionens drift og skjæbne fra mars til igaar." *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 704. Tuesday, 4 desember 1923.

¹⁵⁹ Friedman, *Norsk Polarhistorie II*, 2004. 152. 152-157.

¹⁶⁰ Not signed. "Amundsen paa vei nordover. "Maud" forlod Nome først igaar." *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 327. Saturday, 1 July 1922.

¹⁶¹ Not Signed. "Mauds drift over polhavet" *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 653. Friday, 15 December 1922.

¹⁶² Not signed. "Den første vinter paa "Maud"s anden polreise." *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 140. Saturday, 17 March 1923.

¹⁶³ Not signed. "En melding fra "Maud"" *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 701. Monday, 3 December 1923.

¹⁶⁴ Not signed. "En Julehilsen fra "Maud"" *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 753. Monday, 24 December 1923.

¹⁶⁵ Not signed. "Maud"s drift gaar langsomt. *Aftenposten*. Year 65. No 064. Monday, 4 February 1924.

Amundsen good luck a little more than three years ago.”¹⁶⁶ In Norway, the crew were given a modest welcome. The *Maud*, phase C expedition had ended, although Sverdrup continued to process and publish the data collected, which gained international reputé and fame. The saga from 1918 to 1925 was over. The goal of the expedition had not been reached, but the research done aboard made it famous.

According to Narve Fulsås, the expedition was a failure, as it did not manage to drift over the Pole, but it was a scientific success due to Sverdrup and his work.¹⁶⁷ Sverdrup published his preliminary findings in *The Scientific Monthly* in May 1926.¹⁶⁸ Robert Marc Friedman writes that the material gathered during the *Maud* expedition was enormous and took years to process.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, a sensational expedition acquired interest from the press, and a scientific expedition did not. He sees sensation and science as increasingly mutually exclusive, one could not have both.¹⁷⁰

So why did the government invest so much money in the expedition? The Norwegian government had sponsored previous expeditions with an explicit goal of creating publicity, namely Fridtjof Nansen’s *Fram* I expedition. Narve Fulsås writes that part of the government support for the expedition of Fridtjof Nansen was due to the amount of enthusiasm it was expected that his expedition would create at its supposed triumphal return. What was good for Nansen was good for Norway. That his expedition failed was of no consequence, it created prestige for Norway.¹⁷¹ The issue of polar politics was not on a party political level, it was on a national level. Fulsås writes that the “polar enthusiasm” of Nansen was difficult to place along political conflict lines, so it was non-political and much more valuable than a party victory.¹⁷² There are comparable factors between *Fram* and *Maud*, as *Maud* was also considered non-political, which Fulsås sees as a sign that science was an acceptable way to spend government money.¹⁷³ However, the possible intent that the Norwegian government may have had did not lead to anything positive as *Maud* was a failed polar drift expedition. It did not amount to anything definite in the way of planting the Norwegian flag. When the

¹⁶⁶ Ms 4° 2401:XXV:Avisutklipp: Not signed. Title cut away. *The Gazette*, Montreal, 7 September 1925.

¹⁶⁷ Fulsås, Narve. ”Chapter 3. En æressag for vor nation” In Einar-Arne Drivenes and Harald Dag Jølle (ed) *Norsk Polarhistorie I Ekspedisjonene*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 2004. 220.

¹⁶⁸ Sverdrup, Harald Ulrik. ”Scientific work of the Maud expedition, 1922-1925” in *The Scientific Monthly* Vol 22. No. 5 (May, 1926).

¹⁶⁹ Friedman. *Norsk Polarhistorie II*, 2004. 157.

¹⁷⁰ Friedman *Norsk Polarhistorie II*, 2004. 160.

¹⁷¹ Fulsås, *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 170.

¹⁷² Fulsås, *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 176–177.

¹⁷³ Fulsås, *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 223.

Storting funded the *Maud* expedition, there may have been a hope that it would return in triumph, as Nansen once had done, but the expedition did not help the Norwegian government with instant international sensation, more likely the inverse.

The *Maud* expedition, phase C received predominantly positive coverage. The criticism that had been present at earlier phases was directed at Roald Amundsen personally. The coverage of the expedition did suffer from three facts. First, it was only partially in communication due to atmospheric disturbances and the sheer distance, as the ship was on the other side of the world from Norway. Second, the expedition came increasingly into the shadow of Amundsen's other projects. Last, the media lost interest in the expedition due to a lack of sensation, even something as basic as progress was absent and eventually the expedition was rarely mentioned.

The media supported the expedition with about NOK 14,000 while the Norwegian government spent NOK 700,000. The difference between the figures show that the *Maud* expedition was more of a government sponsored, scientific expedition with ambitions to reach the North Pole, than a sensational, media-funded expedition. The *Maud* expedition was intended to reaffirm Norway's intentions in the Arctic and to make it plain that Norway was a serious polar nation. The *Maud*, phase C segment was the most scientific of the expedition's phases, and the data collected took years to process and publish. The Norwegian Storting had no discussion on the subject of *Maud*'s importance, but the level of funding shows that it had considerable importance for the Storting, and the lack of discussion can also be seen as a positive, as the vote was unanimous. There was a tradition on supporting polar expeditions, and as the i, phase C expedition as a whole was given NOK 500,000 by the Norwegian Storting without any debate, it seems apparent that the expedition was the object of considerable interest in the Norwegian government, but that they would not speak their mind for fear of tying Roald Amundsen down. One can say that the scientific *Maud* expedition held considerable interest for the Norwegian government, and that it was willing to support the expedition to its conclusion. A consequence of the political involvement in the expedition was that Roald Amundsen was unable to use *Maud* as he saw fit, as there were strings attached, despite the government's effort not to add any.

Maud can be seen as a continuation of a tradition to invest in polar affairs for two main reasons. First, prestige as the government can bask in the glory of the expedition's return.

Second, that the expedition gathered material useful in legitimizing the expansion into the Arctic, as Norway increased its knowledge and defined the unknown in a Norwegian context.

It is in this area that the expedition gives continuity to the concept of Norway the polar nation. The *Maud* expedition did not only have the intention of allowing Roald Amundsen to make an attempt at the North Pole, that goal was secondary. The primary focus of the expedition was to gather scientific data needed to understand the Arctic, a geographic area firmly in the Norwegian sphere of interest.

The *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight¹⁷⁴

While *Maud* was being refurbished in Seattle, Amundsen wrote a public letter, stating that he wanted to return to Norway, but that he and his loyal crew would only do so by way of the North Pole.¹⁷⁵ News then surfaced that Amundsen was planning an expedition to the North Pole by airplane, and that he had left the *Maud* expedition. Amundsen was about to exchange ship for airplane and lead what has since been called the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight, and leave *Maud* in the hands of Oscar Wisting and Harald Sverdrup.¹⁷⁶ Bomann-Larsen writes that the expedition had to seem to be a part of the *Maud* expedition, as it had received NOK 700,000 from the Norwegian government to complete the polar drift.¹⁷⁷

This expedition was the beginning of a union of expedition and explorer. As mentioned earlier, both Baldasty and Riffernburgh claim that news from the expeditions became something to market, and during this expedition, the newspapers that bought news from the expedition were predominantly more positive than other news sources. Leon Amundsen had sold the news rights for the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight to *Aftenposten*, *Tidens Tegn*, *Morgenbladet* and *Morgenposten* for NOK 12,000 in 1922.¹⁷⁸ In addition, as mentioned earlier, a supplement was added to the contract that stipulated that the four papers mentioned would pay NOK 1,000 each quarter in exchange for news from *Maud*, phase C.¹⁷⁹ Roald Berg

¹⁷⁴ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 332.

¹⁷⁵ Not signed. "Siste nyt fra Rolad Amundsen. Tre aars kamp mod ugjennomtrængelige ismasser." *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 357. Monday, 1 August 1921.

¹⁷⁶ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 332.

¹⁷⁷ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 327.

¹⁷⁸ NBO: Brevs 812: 2A: Contract between *Aftenposten*, *Morgenposten*, *Morgenbladet* and *Tidens Tegn*, dated 9 July 1922.

¹⁷⁹ NBO: Brevs 812: 2A: Contract between *Aftenposten*, *Morgenposten*, *Morgenbladet* and *Tidens Tegn*, dated 8 November 1922.

writes in *Norsk Polarhistorie* that Amundsen “kept his cards close to his chest”,¹⁸⁰ which was only natural considering that his words, his actions and the results were already sold to the media. It was readily accepted by *Aftenposten* that there was a change of plans and that the game had changed. One day, *Aftenposten* wrote on Amundsen’s hardship with *Maud* in the ice in an article titled “Three years of struggle against impenetrable ice-masses”¹⁸¹ where Amundsen was at the front of his loyal crew aboard *Maud*, vowing to only return across the Pole. Little more than a week later, *Aftenposten* proclaimed “The race to the North Pole!”¹⁸² *Hvepsen*, which was not a part of the buying press, did voice their opinion that Amundsen had forgotten his promise of only arriving home after crossing the North Pole, and that the government bought him whatever he wished for.¹⁸³ From this point onwards, *Hvepsen* became increasingly sceptical to Amundsen and his actions.

In order to raise further funds for the flight, Leon Amundsen made several attempts to contact publishers who might be willing to make a book of his brother’s expedition and the events following *The Northeast Passage*. He also wanted to include an English-language version of the latter book. One such publisher Leon was in contact with was the MacMillan Publishers of New York. The publisher claimed that Amundsen’s book *The Northeast Passage* was not something they would undertake in America, due to “(...) the present state of the public and their reading sympathies (...)”.¹⁸⁴ The MacMillan company was interested in publishing an account of Amundsen’s *Maud* Expeditions Transarctic flight to the North Pole if it was successful, and his brother Leon was adamant that any advance had to be as high as possible due to the “(...) heavy costs (...)”.¹⁸⁵ The company replied that they could not give an advance until they had a manuscript to look at to help them determine the audience and how much the book was worth.¹⁸⁶ In due course, nothing came of the contact with MacMillan, as it failed to do with other publishers as well. *The Northeast Passage* was not printed in English. There was no interest in such material at the time.

¹⁸⁰ Berg, Roald. ”Amundsen og hans aeronatuer” in Einar-Arne Drivenes and Harald Dag Jølle (eds) *Norsk Polarhistorie I Ekspedisjonene*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 2004. 235.

¹⁸¹ Roald Amundsen. ”Sidste nyt fra Roald Amundsen.” *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 357. Monday, 1 August 1922.

¹⁸² Not signed. ”Kapløbet mod Nordpolen.” *Aftenposten*. Year 62. No 272. Wednesday, 10 August 1921.

¹⁸³ Sverre Wegenor. ”Fra vore korrespondenter. Traadløst til ”Hvepsen””. *Hvepsen*. Year 18. No 25. Saturday, 30 June 1923.

¹⁸⁴ NBO:Brevs 812: 2f: Forlagskorrespondanse: d-y: Letter from the MacMillan company to Leon Amundsen, dated 21 April 1923.

¹⁸⁵ NBO:Brevs 812: 2f: Forlagskorrespondanse: d-y: Letter from L. Amundsen to MacMillan Company, dated 3 July 1922.

¹⁸⁶ NBO: Brevs 812: 2f: Forlagskorrespondanse: d-y: Letter from the MacMillan company to Leon Amundsen, dated 24 August 1922.

In a letter to the Norwegian people, given to Leon Amundsen who later gave it to the media, Roald Amundsen explained his actions. It was his intention to include small airplanes on *Maud* and use them to explore the Arctic, but it had become necessary to expand his plans for the *Maud* expedition and include an airplane that was independent of *Maud* to scout a path for the ship to the North Pole and then land the airplane at *Maud*'s depot in East Greenland, and rendezvous with the main expedition. Amundsen had chosen to buy a Larsen airplane, which held the current endurance record of 26 hours, and had hired the best pilot in Norway, Oscar Omdal.¹⁸⁷

In cooperation with his business partner, Hakon H. Hammer, Amundsen bought airplanes from John M. Larsen, a Danish-American who made airplanes in the USA.¹⁸⁸ Larsen considered himself a "Viking" and wanted to support Amundsen and the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight. Larsen therefore sponsored the business transaction and wanted only minimal payment for the airplanes. In a business deal worth USD 80,000, Larsen donated about USD 60,000 worth of airplanes and equipment, reducing the amount Amundsen and Hammer had to pay to USD 20,000.¹⁸⁹ One airplane was named *Kristine* (Curtis machine) and the other *Elizabeth* (JL-6 Larsen machine/Junkers Monoplane). Both were named after Amundsen's current mistress Kristine Elisabeth Bennet.¹⁹⁰ In order to give the pilot Omdal some experience in flying *Elizabeth (I)*, it was decided that the aircraft should be flown to Seattle.¹⁹¹ On his flight with *Elizabeth (I)* from New York to the West Coast, the Larsen aircraft was forced down onto a field and ended up upside down with a broken wing. Amundsen returned to New York and found a replacement airplane, also a JL-6 Larsen/Junkers monoplane, which he also named *Elizabeth*.¹⁹² This airplane is referred to as *Elizabeth (II)*. The aircraft was now shipped by train to Seattle, where it was loaded aboard *Maud* along with the Curtis machine.

Maud, phase C was under the command of Wisting and carried the airplanes and the flight crew aboard to Nome. When *Maud* left Nome, Amundsen and his crew set off for Point

¹⁸⁷ Roald Amundsen "Roald Amundsen vil i sommer fly over Nordpolen! For aa rekognosere og kartlegge "Maud"s senere rute." *Dagbladet*. Year 54. No 131. Friday 9 June 1922; Roald Amundsen. "Roald Amundsen flyver om en maaned til Nordpolen." *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 287. Friday, 9 June 1922.

¹⁸⁸ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Amundsen Roald til Amundsen Leon: Telegram to Leon from Roald Amundsen, dated 14 January 1922. "Aeroplanes ordered here".

¹⁸⁹ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter from John M. Larsen to Roald Amundsen, dated 9 March 1923.

¹⁹⁰ In public they were named after an old aunt. Boman-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 320–321.

¹⁹¹ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Amundsen Roald til Amundsen Leon: Letter to Leon from Roald Amundsen, dated 31 January 1922.

¹⁹² NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Amundsen Roald til Amundsen Leon: Letter to Leon from Roald Amundsen, dated 25 April 1922.

Barrow on a borrowed Swedish-owned ship, *C.P. Homes*. Ice kept the expedition from reaching Point Barrow, and they set up their base at a log cabin called Maudheim, in Wainwright. From there, Amundsen established the base he was going to launch the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight from. In Norway, the expedition was followed with intense interest. In June 1922, *Aftenposten* had a large front page article on Amundsen where his previous actions were glorified and his new plans said to be “(...) high-flying and more than daring (...)”¹⁹³ The media collected opinions from both meteorologists and other pilots, and asked them of their opinion on Amundsen’s prospects. One pilot, Amundsen’s future right-hand man Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, went far in claiming that the planned expedition would not be difficult, and when asked of the prospect of flying 15 hours continuously, he claimed “(...) it would be more straining to drive a car for 15 hours.”¹⁹⁴ *Dagbladet*, which was cut out of the news flow, reported that it was “make or break” for Roald Amundsen’s expedition, citing a Danish flier who stated that the attempt was risky.¹⁹⁵ *Hvepsen* also commented and proclaimed Amundsen as the conqueror of the North Pole, and even if he crashed, he would ride home on a polar bear, “(...) where others die as mosquitoes, he would find a way.”¹⁹⁶ At the end of June, *Aftenposten* reported that Amundsen would probably fly to Spitsbergen instead of Cape Columbia on East Greenland, as Amundsen had sent a man to Spitsbergen to prepare a landing strip. *Aftenposten* duly reported that they expected Amundsen in Oslo within three weeks.¹⁹⁷ At the beginning of July 1922, it was reported that Amundsen was still in Nome. Not long after, there came a message stating that Amundsen was postponing his planned flight until June 1923, as it was too late in the season to be able to make the flight.¹⁹⁸ Rumours made the newspapers print stories claiming that Amundsen had changed his mind and was about to fly.¹⁹⁹ Even if Amundsen had cancelled the flight for that year, he was still reported as trying a flight in late August.²⁰⁰

¹⁹³ Not signed. “Roald Amundsen flyver om en maaned til Nordpolen.” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 287. Friday, 29 June 1922.

¹⁹⁴ Not signed. “Udsigterne for Roald Amundsens luftfærd over polen.” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 288 Friday, 29 June 1922.

¹⁹⁵ Not signed. “Amundsens dristige flyveplan.” *Dagbladet*. Year 54. No 132. Saturday, 10 June 1922.

¹⁹⁶ Not signed. “Fra vore korrespondenter.” *Hvepsen*. Year 17. No 24. Saturday, 24 June 1922.

¹⁹⁷ Not signed. “Roald Amundsen – efter fuldført Nordpols-flyvning – være i Norge om tre uger?” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 318. Monday, 26 June 1922.

¹⁹⁸ Not signed. “Roald Amundsens polflyvning udsættes sandsynligvis til juni næste aar.” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 381. Monday, 31 July 1922.

¹⁹⁹ Not signed. “Amundsen vil alligevel forsøge at flyve over Nordpolen iaar” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 391. Saturday, 5 August 1922.

²⁰⁰ Not signed. “Roald Amundsen etablerer basis i Wainwrightviken.” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 440. Thursday, 31 August 1922.

During the winter of 1922–1923, Amundsen sent some long letters regarding the voyage with the C.P. Holmes to Wainwright, the unloading of the airplane *Elizabeth (II)*²⁰¹ and some of how he and Omdal lived during the winter.²⁰² When spring finally arrived, it was time to test the aircraft *Elizabeth (II)*, which had been assembled during the wait. Amundsen and Omdal made a test flight on 11 May 1923. It indicated that the airplane was in bad shape. During landing the landing gear and skis broke, and the airplane crashed, destroying it completely, but Omdal was unharmed. Tor Bomann-Larsen writes that it should be considered a feat that a boxed airplane, which after an Arctic winter had been assembled on site, without the help of a professional workshop, was capable of flying at all.²⁰³ In *Aftenposten*, Omdal claimed that the engine was old and faulty, and that the landing gear was poorly designed, causing it to break during landing.²⁰⁴ The newspapers appear to agree and reported that Amundsen had received poor gear and a faulty engine.²⁰⁵ In a letter from John Larsen (the aircraft factory owner), he stated repeatedly that he and his colleagues felt that Omdal was not a sufficiently experienced solo pilot to fly such an airplane, and that he was not nearly competent enough as a mechanic to be able to handle the airplane in Arctic conditions.²⁰⁶ After the fateful test flight in May, the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight to reach the North Pole was cancelled again, this time for good.

That the airplane was criticized in the media as poorly constructed and faulty sparked a reaction from Larsen. His letter indicates that Amundsen or Hammer issued a statement in the press to the effect that the factory had been “selling them a faulty engine”²⁰⁷ and “deceived” them into buying the airplanes from Larsen.²⁰⁸ This provoked him into threatening legal actions against Amundsen. Larsen appears to have been angered by Amundsen’s efforts to put all the blame on others. Having received the equipment from Larsen, Amundsen then shipped the crated airplanes 3,000 miles, first across America by train, then north by boat (on deck), and finally across land to Wainwright in Northern Canada. Amundsen then left the shipment

²⁰¹ Roald Amundsen. “Roald Amundsens rapport fra vinterkvarteret ved Wainwright” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 578. Saturday, 11 November 1922.

²⁰² Not signed. “Roald Amundsens overvintringshus i Wainwright” *Aftenposten*. Year 63. No 678. Thursday, 28 December 1922.

²⁰³ Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 340.

²⁰⁴ Not signed. “Hvorfor Roald Amundsen ikke kunde starte polflyvningen”. *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 516. Saturday, 8 September 1924.

²⁰⁵ Not signed. “Amundsens polmaskine var av Mr. Larsen utstyret med en mindre god motor” *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 351. Tuesday afternoon 19 June 1923.

²⁰⁶ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter to Roald Amundsen from John M. Larsen. Enclosed copy of letters. 12, dated 16 December 1923.

²⁰⁷ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter to Roald Amundsen from John M. Larsen, dated 16 December 1923.

²⁰⁸ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter to Roald Amundsen from John M. Larsen, explanatory, 1, dated 16 December 1923.

exposed to an Arctic winter, and finally he had the planes assembled by an unskilled individual. Larsen claimed that Amundsen did not allow two mechanics and a “crack” pilot to accompany the expedition.²⁰⁹ The pilot in question was named Fullerton.²¹⁰ When the attempt was unsuccessful, Larsen claimed, the blame was put on him for selling Amundsen “old” equipment.²¹¹ Larsen also demanded payment, as the contracted amount Amundsen was to pay, was USD 20,000, of which only USD 11,500 had been received. Larsen was particularly angered when Hammer claimed that Amundsen had said, with regard to the missing funds, that: “Mr Larsen is a rich man and does not need the money.”²¹² That the media had claimed that the Larsen airplanes were faulty can be confirmed in numerous articles. *Aftenposten* went as far as to claim that the crash of *Elizabeth (I)* was the fault of Larsen for selling Amundsen an airplane that “should have been broken up years ago”.²¹³ The outcome of the issue with Mr Larsen was that Hammer wrote a statement saying that the information that had been published in the media was “unfounded”²¹⁴ and that Amundsen’s expedition had failed due to “(...) climatic obstacles and insufficient technical organization at Capt. Amundsen’s command in the North.”²¹⁵

The letter from Larsen to Hammer and Amundsen has not been published before, and the claims are those of Larsen himself, but his story sheds some light on the difficulties of conducting an expedition so far from any technical infrastructure and the consequences of negative utterances in the media. The statement from Hammer has never been printed, but neither he nor Amundsen went to the media with complaints against Larsen’s airplanes after the letter had been received. Thereafter, the expedition’s failure was the result of “bad luck”. In the media, the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight had been a flop, as *Aftenposten* writes: “(...) the news that Roald Amundsen had to abandon his expedition will – we cannot deny it – cause national disappointment, and must feel like a defeat for Amundsen.”²¹⁶ *Aftenposten* did

²⁰⁹ The two mechanics are not mentioned in press or literature and only appear in Mr. Larsen’s letter.

²¹⁰ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 322. Major Fullerton was a Canadian officer.

²¹¹ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter to Roald Amundsen from John M. Larsen, explanatory, 9–16, dated 16 December 1923.

²¹² NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter to Roald Amundsen from John M. Larsen. explanatory, 2, dated 16 December 1923.

²¹³ Not signed. “Roald Amundsen har opgit polflyvningen”. *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 350. Tuesday, 19 June 1923.

²¹⁴ NBO: Brevs 812: 1: Letter to John M. Larsen from Hakon H. Hammer, dated 24 February 1924.

²¹⁵ NBO: Brevs 812: 1 Letter to John M. Larsen from Hakon H. Hammer, dated 23 February 1924.

²¹⁶ Not signed. ”Roald Amundsen har opgit polflyvningen” *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 35. Tuesday, 19 June 1923.

immediately state that Roald Amundsen had delivered the message as a true man, which should be honoured in light of his earlier achievements.²¹⁷

Dagbladet, which was not part of the media–expedition cooperation, was not as kind in their attacks on Amundsen, as they wrote that he had been a disappointment to his many fans. The paper also attacked his optimism, his lack of planning, which they deemed “foolhardy”, and that he had “underestimated the difficulty” of working in the Arctic. Furthermore, the paper criticized how long it took for the news to arrive, 40 days. *Dagbladet* claimed that the two safety-expeditions that had been sent north to safeguard Amundsen on his flight could have been stopped sooner, minimizing the cost.²¹⁸

One of the expeditions had cost the Norwegian government NOK 60,000. Stortinget approved of using the funds on a safety-expedition for the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic flight in 1923. The funds were approved with six votes against, and there was no debate on the subject.²¹⁹ The choices made by Amundsen proved to be a problem later, as one member of the Storting stated that he did not wish to support such “foolish” flying ventures a second time.²²⁰ Still, the fact that the Norwegian government took action to help Amundsen shows that he was still a person of interest.

Amundsen’s business partner Hammer also organized a private safety expedition along with the Junker aircraft company²²¹ and Norsk Luftseiladsforening (Aeroclub of Norway).²²² The private safety expedition arranged by Hammer was followed with curiosity, but it did not achieve anything definite.

That Roald Amundsen failed in his first polar flight was good news for the comic press. They criticized Amundsen as a lunatic, and claimed that the money spent on him should have been spent on a lock to keep him under control, and also on the government, who were all too willing to spend money that could have been put to better use elsewhere.²²³ *Hvepsen*

²¹⁷ Not signed. ”Roald Amundsen har opgit polflyvningen” *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 35. Tuesday, 19 June 1923.

²¹⁸ Not signed. ”Amundsen opgir sin polar-flyvning” *Dagbladet*. Year 55. No 139. Tuesday, 19 June 1923.

²¹⁹ Kongeriket Norges toogsyttiende ordentlige Stortingsforhandlinger 7a / 7b 1923. 1702.

²²⁰ Kongeriket Norges fireogsyttiende ordentlige Stortingsforhandlinger 7a / 7b 1925. 653 (speaker was J. Christiansen).

²²¹ Not signed. ”Ogsaa en amerikansk-tysk sikringsekspedition for Amundsen til Spitsbergen?” *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 300. Tuesday, 29 May 1923.

²²² Not signed. ”Konsul Hammer erklærer, at han under enhver omstændighet vil starte.” *Aftenposten*. Year 64. No 308. Friday, 1 June 1923.

²²³ Not signed. ”Fra vore korrespondenter.” *Hvepsen*. Year 18. No 21. Saturday, 2 June 1923.

continued its attacks throughout 1923 and well into 1924. *Karikaturen* used the occasion to state that: “1923 was the year when Roald did not fly, again.”²²⁴



The *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight marked a shift in how Roald Amundsen explored by introducing the airplane. The introduction of a technological machine to hasten the work of exploration was nothing new. Robert Scott had included motorised sleighs on his fateful Antarctic expedition, in competition with Amundsen's dogs. The machines back then were unreliable, but that was changing, and Amundsen chose to include airplanes on his *Maud* expedition. In general,

airplane designs and mechanical engines were steadily becoming more and more reliable, and the understanding of mechanics expanded. The inclusion of airplanes in polar exploration was seen as a benefit. With an airplane, several days or even weeks of muscle-based effort could be completed in mere hours. The 1920's were also a time of dramatic aeronautical development, as the Larsen airplanes proved with their endurance records. The First World War had introduced many people to the art of flying through military service, and the airplanes developed during the war were the beginning of man's romance with flying. In America, where Amundsen operated, flying had taken on a religious aspect. Amundsen had already learned the hard way that in order to tap this mechanical resource, one had to be prepared. To achieve results, one had to use logistics, planning, know-how, and a lot of money. Logistics was needed to get the machines, their spare parts to the right place and all the proper tools. Planning to make sure that one had what one needed on site. Know-how, or knowledge, of the machines and how they were affected by their environment. Last there was funding, which was needed to make all a reality.

²²⁴ Lille Peter. “Hvad der hendte i 1923” *Karikaturen*. Year 7. No 52. Wednesday, 31 Desember 1923.

3

The Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight²²⁵

“We, I and my comrades, cannot promise to reach the pole, but we will do what we can.”²²⁶

Amundsen’s response to the spectacular failure of his first attempt to fly across the North Pole was to seek out better equipment and try again as soon as possible. While still full of ambition, Amundsen lacked money. His last expedition had brought him into a questionable alliance with Hakon Hammer. That alliance was soon broken due to Amundsen’s bankruptcy. His further efforts to raise funds brought him into a lasting cooperation with a private sponsor, Lincoln Ellsworth, who donated enough funds to buy the needed airplanes. Amundsen also made an alliance with an institution and the media to organize and fund the rest of the expedition.

The Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight was based on the plan and equipment from an earlier expedition attempt that was cancelled at the last minute. When the Maud Expedition Transarctic Flight was aborted in 1923, Amundsen continued his cooperation with Hammer. According to Tor Bomann-Larsen, it was a cooperation that had an air of desperation about it.²²⁷ Hammer and Amundsen planned their new expedition in 1924. Tor Bomann-Larsen writes: “There is no purpose in reconstructing the monetary building [that Hammer created] seventy years after it collapsed.”²²⁸ It may be interesting to take a brief look at the plans of 1924. Roald Berg states that Hammer acted as a guarantor for the economical side and made a host of business deals.²²⁹ The sources of the finances were press rights, movie rights and publishing rights. The plans for the expedition are to be found in Norsk Luftseiladsforening’s

²²⁵ In Norwegian it is named “Amundsen-Ellsworth polarflyvning” after the stock company ”A/S Roald Amundsens polflyvning 1925” which ran the expedition. The expedition is also known as ”polarflyvningen” (the polar flight) and ”den nye expedition” (the new expedition). It was even considered as a ”Transarctic Flight” at one point. To reduce the amount of confusion, the official English name is used.

²²⁶ Roald Amundsen. ””Farm” og ”Hobby” paa vei til Spitsbergen.” *Tidens Tegn*. Year 16. No 84. Saturday, 11 April 1925. Author’s translation.

²²⁷ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 345.

²²⁸ Bomann-Larsen, *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 352.

²²⁹ Berg *Norsk Polarhistorie I*, 2004. 239.

archives, and called for three Dornier model Wal (whale) airplanes that were manufactured in Germany, but assembled in Pisa, Italy in order to circumvent the Versailles Treaty. As a consequence, Roald Amundsen met with Benito Mussolini on 7 April 1924.²³⁰ The plan called for an American (USA) and three Italian crewmembers, a photographer, three Norwegian pilots, and Roald Amundsen, and was estimated to cost USD 300,000.²³¹ The plans were launched to the public on 19 December 1923, in all the major Norwegian newspapers.²³² Funds came from the USA, Germany and Norway. The expedition was supposed to be Norwegian in essence, but Bomann-Larsen writes that it had been sold as a national affair both in the USA and Norway.²³³ When the preparations were to begin, and it was time to start paying bills, it turned out that Hammer had neither sponsors nor funds. Officially, the expedition was abandoned due to “lack of funding”.²³⁴

Amundsen, trapped in legal obligations, considered himself insolvent and filed for bankruptcy.²³⁵ At the time, this was a public disgrace. Bomann-Larsen states that Hammer was known to have been involved in financial scandals before, and Amundsen knew this, as the information surfaced in 1922, when he was directly informed. He was also made aware of this fact on several subsequent occasions.²³⁶

The legacy of Hammer hampered Amundsen’s later expeditions. Some good did come out of the failure, as Roald Berg point out, as Amundsen came in contact with a group of pilots centred around Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, including Oscar Omdal and Odd Dahl. Berg states that Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen had come into the project at an early stage, as a technical consultant for Leon Amundsen and as a pilot during one of the safety expeditions sent to Spitsbergen in 1923.²³⁷ During the planned expedition with Hammer, he was to be the leader of one of the airplanes.²³⁸

²³⁰ Berg, *Norsk Polarhistorie I ekspedisjonene*, 2004. 239.

²³¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:V:B-D: Account in German from H. Hammer to Dornier, undated.

²³² Not signed. ”Roald Amundsen fremlegger sin definitive plan.” *Dagbladet*. Year 55. No 295. Wednesday, 19 December 1923. Also at same date in *Aftenposten* and *Tidens Tegn*.

²³³ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 350.

²³⁴ Not Signed. ”Polflyvningen definitivt opgit for iaar” *Aftenposten*. Year 65. No 367. Friday, 27 June 1924.

²³⁵ Berg, *Norsk Polarhistorie I ekspedisjonene*, 2004. 239–240; Boman-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 352; Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen. *50 år for kongen*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1957. 96. Amundsen had debts and personal issues with his brother that were a large factor in the bankruptcy, it was not all down to Hammer.

²³⁶ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 329, 338, 344, and 352.

²³⁷ Berg, *Norsk Polarhistorie I ekspedisjonene*, 2004. 239.

²³⁸ Not signed. ”Løitnant Riiser-Larsen skal delta i Amundsens Nordpolsflyvning.” *Tidens Tegn*. Year 15. No 95. Thursday, 24 April 1924.

As with all of Roald Amundsen's expeditions, differences exist in the accounts of how Amundsen came into contact with Norsk Luftseiladsforening (NLF, Aeroclub of Norway) and what role this institution played in the expedition. These differences are telling, as they show the many different perspectives that has been used to understand the expedition and what has been seen as important in the expedition. The purpose is to show that there is room for more research on the subject.

Amundsen himself writes in *Flukten til 88° Nord* that he asked the NLF to cooperate, and "they welcomed me with open arms."²³⁹ He then mentions the meeting with Lincoln Ellsworth. Amundsen makes a point to thank Rolf Thommessen, Arnold Ræstad²⁴⁰, Johan Sverre²⁴¹, and the support of several governments (without specifying which ones).²⁴² Together, they would create an expedition whose aim was to explore the Arctic from Spitsbergen to the North Pole in order to ascertain "scientifically" if there was any land in the north or not.²⁴³ The focus was on the deed of the expedition.

Both Roald Amundsen and the NLF are reduced to mere bystanders in Bomann-Larsen's account. In Bomann-Larsen's biography of Amundsen, Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen is awarded the leading role. Riiser-Larsen was instrumental to Amundsen, as he was the one who brought the planned expedition to NLF and made it possible to arrange the expedition under the auspices of NLF.²⁴⁴ Another important figure to Bomann-Larsen is Lincoln Ellsworth, who generously donated his father's funds. Both Ellsworth and Riiser-Larsen were necessary for Roald Amundsen's comeback after his bankruptcy.²⁴⁵ Ellsworth provided the funds while Riiser-Larsen planned and worked on the expedition on a daily basis.²⁴⁶ Bomann-Larsen mentions the NLF, claiming that on 9 March 1925, Roald Amundsen met with his "partners" in NLF and that they elected Rolf Thommessen as president of a company that would be the legal entity executing the expedition. Furthermore, Bomann-Larsen writes that this move was done

²³⁹ Amundsen. Roald, *Gennem luften til 88° Nord* Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1925.17.

²⁴⁰ Arnold Christopher Ræstad, 1878–1945. One of Norway's most influential characters, foreign correspondent editor in *Tidens Tegn* in 1910 and Foreign minister in Otto Blehr's second government (1921). During the Second World War, he worked for the Norwegian government-in-exile; Dahl, Hans Fredrik, "Arnold Ræstad" Store Norske Leksikon. Copyright Store Norske Leksikon. URL: http://snl.no/.nbl_biografi/Arnold_R%C3%A6stad/utdypning (10.11.2011)

²⁴¹ Unknown person, Tor Bomann-Larsen claims he worked for the international Olympic committee. Source: Bomann-Larsen. Roald Amundsen. 1995. 383.

²⁴² Amundsen. *Gennem luften til 88° Nord* 1925. 17–18.

²⁴³ Amundsen. *Gennem luften til 88° Nord* 1925. 19–20.

²⁴⁴ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 369.

²⁴⁵ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 371.

²⁴⁶ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 372.

explicitly so that Amundsen's private finances would not be mixed with that of the expedition.²⁴⁷

Roald Berg writes an alternative account where he more clearly defines the link between Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, Leon Amundsen and Norsk Luftseiladsforening. Berg views Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen as a consultant for Leon Amundsen on flying issues, and Riiser-Larsen became the link between Roald Amundsen and the NLF (Thommessen).²⁴⁸ In Berg's account, the NLF was an administrative support apparatus needed to successfully administer the expedition.²⁴⁹ Berg sees the NLF as a lobby group for flying enthusiasts, but not as a financial backer. In Berg's opinion, the funds came mostly from Lincoln Ellsworth, public funding and press contracts. Berg includes and makes a point of showing the support from the Norwegian government and what the expedition meant for Norway, as Norway was to acquire formal control over Spitsbergen the same year.

Thommessen claims in his own account, written years later when he and Amundsen were embroiled in hostile litigation, that he received a request from Amundsen in which he asked whether the NLF could take responsibility for organizing an expedition that Amundsen had planned. The board of the NLF met and discussed the issue. Initially, there was strong opposition to the idea, mostly due to economic constraints and reflections on how Amundsen had conducted himself during his cooperation with Hammer. The board came to the conclusion that if it was to take on the task, it had to have complete administrative and economical leadership, and that all income would be put into the NLF treasury. This was acceptable to Amundsen.²⁵⁰

In October 1924, the newspaper *Dagbladet* reported that Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen had plans to fly to the North Pole in 1925 with two airplanes, and sought funds. His plan was to offer the leadership of the expedition to Roald Amundsen.²⁵¹ This was how the media was told the first tentative steps towards a new expedition were taken. This is what later became the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight.

²⁴⁷ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 383–384.

²⁴⁸ Berg *Norsk Polarhistorie I Ekspedisjonene* 2004. 239–240.

²⁴⁹ Berg *Norsk Polarhistorie I Ekspedisjonene* 2004. 239–240.

²⁵⁰ NBO: Ms. Fol. 2640. Rolf Thommessen. "Roald Amundsen og Norsk Luftseiladsforening. En fremstilling til bruk for Voldgiftretten" (I). 2.

²⁵¹ Not Signed. "Vil Riiser-Larsen flyve til nordpolen neste sommer?" *Dagbladet*. Year 56. No 244. Saturday, 18 October 1924.

Another question that has implications for the understanding of the expedition is the question of who was the actual leader? In Amundsen's account, there are two leaders, Amundsen and Ellsworth. Riiser Larsen was second in command. Bomann-Larsen has a mixed view, as he considers Amundsen as a leader, but not the actual leader. He claims that Amundsen was the leader because he had Ellsworth's funds as backup²⁵², while his number two was Riiser-Larsen, who did the day-to-day planning. Bomann-Larsen changes his view and explains that Amundsen was not an absolute leader at all, as he was not able to (secretly) influence the crew to make the expedition a transarctic expedition (to Alaska) rather than a polar flight, and concludes that Amundsen was not the *de facto* leader of the expedition, as he did not have the support necessary to make changes at will.²⁵³

Amundsen, Ellsworth and Riiser-Larsen were the official leaders of the expedition itself; the leader of the organization that arranged and coordinated the expedition was Thommessen.

Amundsen did a tour of the USA to help fund the expedition and repay his creditors. His impresario was Lee Keedick, who had been so since 1912. Amundsen frequently travelled to the United States to give lectures focusing on the South Pole expedition²⁵⁴ and the "First circumnavigation of the Arctic basin."²⁵⁵

On his tour in 1924, Amundsen met Lincoln Ellsworth and made a lasting alliance with Lincoln, who became his private sponsor. James Ellsworth, Lincoln's father was a well-known coal-mining millionaire and through him, Lincoln was able to fund the airplanes for the expedition. Ellsworth was an engineer, trailblazer and geologist who had led several geological expeditions to the Andes. He saw himself as a collector of rare sights and impressions. As the son of a coal-mining millionaire, he had the resources necessary, and he wanted to sponsor Amundsen for the sole purpose of joining the expedition. Ellsworth was able to donate USD 85,000 to the expedition,²⁵⁶ which was enough to pay for the airplanes needed for an attempted flight.

²⁵² Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 283.

²⁵³ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 391.

²⁵⁴ NBO: Brevs 812:2g:Lee Keedick: Letter to Captain Amundsen from Lee Keedick, dated 3 September 1924.

²⁵⁵ NBO: Brevs 812:2g:Lee Keedick: 4 page document labeled "Schedule", dated 16 October 1924.

²⁵⁶ Not signed. "Amerikaneren, som skjænket Amundsen 100,000 dollar til pol-ekspeditionen." *Aftenposten*. Year 65. No 680. Saturday, 29 November 1924.

The money was immediately transferred to Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, who bought two Dornier Wal airplanes.²⁵⁷ This action caused a dispute with the board of NLF, who felt bypassed as economic managers and the proper organ who should receive the money and by the airplanes.²⁵⁸ In a series of telegrams, NLF asked Amundsen if he wanted to continue the cooperation, since his actions led them to believe that they were no longer needed. Amundsen, possibly full of enthusiasm, asked for a postponement of the contract, and the NLF duly informed Amundsen that they felt that the venture was over for their part, if Amundsen so chose. But Amundsen chose to cooperate,²⁵⁹ and sent a telegram to the NLF, asking them to continue to lead the expedition.²⁶⁰ He sent them the remaining USD 5,000 of the USD 85,000 first donated by Ellsworth. He also transferred ownership of the airplanes to the NLF, and agreed that all future income would go directly to the NLF. So Amundsen chose to give the economic and administrative leadership of his planned expedition to the NLF and Rolf Thommessen.

In order to safeguard those who wanted to help Amundsen, the administration founded a stock company that would be the legal entity economically responsible for and owner of the expedition; A/S Roald Amundsens Polflyvning 1925.²⁶¹ It appears to have been a daughter company of A/S Norsk Luftseiladsforening. Both Amundsen and Ellsworth were hired by A/S Roald Amundsen Polflyvning 1925 as leaders of an expedition to the North Pole under the economic and administrative leadership of NLF. As a leader Amundsen, would have a fixed salary and 50% of any surplus.²⁶² Amundsen agreed completely, but he wanted, and got, unlimited control during the polar flight itself. Ellsworth also accepted the contract and was hired as a navigator on the terms that the expedition would carry the Norwegian flag, that he would be the only American on the expedition, and he also insisted on not being paid a salary (since it was, after all, his money). Riiser-Larsen and Leif Dietrichson were hired as pilots. Oscar Omdal was hired at a later stage as a mechanic, and Karl Feucht (an engine specialist from Dornier) was included in the expedition on Spitsbergen mere days before take-off.

²⁵⁷ Not Signed. "Roald Amundsen har sluttet kontrakt om leverance av to Dornier-flyvemaskiner." *Aftenposten*. Year 65. No 666. Monday, 24 November 1924.

²⁵⁸ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640. Thommessen (I). 4.

²⁵⁹ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640. Thommessen (I). 5.

²⁶⁰ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Rolf Thommessen, "Roald Amundsen og Norsk Luftseiladsforening. En fremstilling til bruk for Voldgiftretten". (II). Bilag (Copies). Bilag VI (Telegram from Roald Amundsen to Aeroclub Norway).

²⁶¹ The legal company was named A/S Roald Amundsen Polflyvning 1925, but changed to A/S Amundsen-Ellsworth Polflyvning 1925. Both names relate to the same stock company, and both names were used at the same time and side by side.

²⁶² NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen. (II). Bilag XV.

Amundsen, Ellsworth and Riiser-Larsen were *de jure* hired men of the expedition, although they were *de facto* leaders. The arrangement was a way to give Amundsen a clean slate to work with. Amundsen's cooperation and involvement with Hammer had resulted in a situation where Amundsen was legally obliged to honour contracts made by Hammer, but as the funds had vanished, he was no longer able to honour them. Amundsen was legally bankrupt, and all income or advances that went to his person would be confiscated to pay off debt from the *Maud* expedition and to compensate former investors. By being an employee of a stock company owned and operated by Norsk Luftseiladsforening, Amundsen was protected from these contracts and creditors. His name and symbolic status was given to the expedition, but his personal legal complications was kept outside of it. According to Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, the expedition was made out to be a stock company in order to make sure that the profits went to the participants as salary in order to avoid taxes. The stock company arrangement would also protect the members of NLF from financial trouble, should the expedition fail.²⁶³

There appears to be a consensus on the role of Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen as a central character in brokering the contact between Roald Amundsen and Norsk Luftseiladsforening, and as a link between Roald Amundsen and Rolf Thommessen. There is also consensus on the role of Lincoln Ellsworth as an important source of funds, but whose actual role was not clearly defined. However, there is not a consensus on the role and place of the NLF as both Berg and Bomann-Larsen tone down the role of the institution. The NLF was the legal owner of A/S Roald Amundsens polfyvning 1925, and the participants were hired men. It can be claimed that the contracts and cooperation with the NLF was a pro-forma arrangement set up to bypass creditors and legal issues. But it may also be viewed as a statement that Amundsen was no longer the absolute ruler of his own expeditions.

There is a consensus stating that Roald Amundsen's knowledge and skills were not critical to the completion of the expedition. His major contribution was his name and status, as the hero and symbol for Norway and others. His fame had attracted a wealthy sponsor; others did the day-to-day preparations and physical work.

When Ellsworth donated his funds to the expedition, the NLF decided that it had sufficient funding to begin setting things in motion. To fund the rest of the expedition, Rolf Thommessen and his *Tidens Tegn* proved critical, and it is worth looking at how other

²⁶³ NBO Brevs 812:1 Letter to Roald Amundsen from Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, dated 8 December 1924.

historians have treated the relationship between journalist and explorer. Tor Bomann-Larsen does not mention the cooperation between Amundsen and the media, but on the other hand, he does specifically state and makes a point of the fact that reporters were an important part of the expedition.²⁶⁴ Roald Berg writes in *Norsk Polarhistorie* that the cooperation between Roald Amundsen and Rolf Thommessen was a strong alliance between the “polar adventurers” and the press,²⁶⁵ but Berg does not dwell on the details of the alliance. Both historians agree that the media were important. The nature of the cooperation was to raise the funds needed in addition to the generous donation from Lincoln Ellsworth.

The expedition’s funding was greatly aided by having a professional media man on top, although the sale of the news did not go exactly as planned, mostly due to the legal legacy of Hakon Hammer. The NLF had considerable trouble in selling the story of the expedition to foreign newspapers. Several newspapers claimed that they had made deals with Amundsen through Hammer and would keep Amundsen accountable for those contracts. NLF refused, as it was an expedition organized and led by A/S Roald Amundsens polflyvning 1925.

Amundsen the employee was not a legal part of the expedition’s finances. One British newspaper, the *Times*, flatly refused to do business with Amundsen on the grounds that “(...) they had never had business with anyone who showed so little regard to his commitments.”²⁶⁶ Another paper, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, did not want to have anything to do with Amundsen due to the paper’s past experience with him.²⁶⁷ Two other newspapers demanded that any cost regarding news they bought would be deducted from any new contract.²⁶⁸

Although there was trouble, there were interested buyers. Internationally, the *New York Times* bought the rights for the continental USA. Newspapers in the British Empire bought news from Central News, a syndicate, where interested newspapers pooled funds and purchased the rights from that company. In Norway, Rolf Thommessen’s own newspaper, *Tidens Tegn*, the rival *Aftenposten* and many others bought the news, although there are no contracts or sources that show exactly what they paid. The close cooperation between media and the expedition did have some other results, for instance the media not affiliated with the expedition were respectful with regard to the wishes of expedition members. At one time, Riiser-Larsen asked the press not to write on the expedition in order to keep it in the dark from possible

²⁶⁴ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 387.

²⁶⁵ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 239.

²⁶⁶ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 (I) Thommessen. 8.

²⁶⁷ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 (I) Thommessen. 8.

²⁶⁸ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 (I) Thommessen. 8.

competitors. This was honoured by the papers.²⁶⁹ Fredrik Ramm, a journalist who usually worked for *Tidens Tegn*, was hired by A/S Roald Amundsens Polflyvning 1925 to be the correspondent. For this, he was given a wage of NOK 666.67 a month, free travel and board.²⁷⁰ Ramm wrote much of what was printed in the newspapers and which the audience read and based their opinion on. He wrote so much that it is quite possible that texts marked as written by Roald Amundsen or other leaders of the expedition, were written by Ramm. To show the scale of the relationship between the press and expedition, it is enlightening to look at the account of Thommessen, who writes in his legal case against Amundsen that most of the staff and resources at his newspaper were in some way involved with NLF and the expedition for free.²⁷¹ *Tidens Tegn* and the expedition were almost one entity, woven tightly together, as there was intermixture of both interest and people between the expedition and the reporting media, i.e. a protocoperation. But this information was not circulated in the news reported to the public. The focus in the news was on Amundsen and the task at hand, it was not on the cooperation between expedition and media.

The Norwegian and international media bought the news from NLF, written by Ramm. This made an impact on the view of the expedition held in Norway. As most newspapers were in one way or another a customer of NLF, most of the media portrayed the expedition similarly, in some cases identically and universally positive. The Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight received broad coverage in *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *Tidens Tegn*. The plans for the expedition were launched in the media on 11 April 1925. In every paper, the very same article was written, the exact same words printed, including Roald Amundsen's account of how things were planned and how the expedition was to be conducted. The first account did not make the front page in any paper, and there were no comments printed.²⁷² But interest in the expedition steadily grew as time passed and the launch date neared. The expedition was launched from Kings Bay in Spitsbergen (Svalbard) from August 1925. The expedition left for the North Pole on 21 May 1925, and the story was in the papers the following day. Although there were variations on title and amount of coverage, most of the articles were identical in nature. The only media participant seemingly critical was *Hvepsen*, which stated

²⁶⁹ NBO Brevs 812:1. Letter to Roald Amundsen by Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, dated 8 desember 1924. 3.

²⁷⁰ Ms 4° 2401:XVI:R:Ra:Ri: Contract between Fredrik Ramm and A/S Amundsen – Ellsworth Polflyvning 1925, dated 20 March 1925.

²⁷¹ NBO Ms. Fol 2640 Thommessen. (I). 109.

²⁷² Amundsen, Roald. "Polflyvningen- plan og forberedelser" *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *Tidens Tegn*. Saturday, 11 April 1925.

the following on Roald Amundsen's expedition plans in the pre-phase of the expedition:

*"Adventure, say some. Courage, say others. Sport, say we. Sport under a mask of science."*²⁷³

The expedition was also expanded to include about 30 members, working with logistics, maintenance and much more. Of these members, six were to attempt the Pole using two airplanes, *N24* and *N25*. Due to restraints from both the NLF and Ellsworth's family, they were not allowed to attempt a flight across the Arctic basin. The decision was to go to the Pole, reconnoitre, and return to Kings Bay. Although Amundsen tried to change the rules of the game before take-off, he was voted down, as the crew were not interested in making the polar flight into a trans-polar flight.²⁷⁴

The coverage after take-off was similar. Everything that was even remotely related to polar activities was seen as good material. Most articles from the 24 days the expedition were lost, can be divided into four loose groups. First, those with the expectation that Amundsen would soon return with a new polar record and information on the possibilities in the north, which dominated the first week. Second were articles related to informing the public that Amundsen would soon return, and that there was no point in worrying. Included were also articles on the constant pressure on the news desks for new information. The third group also claim that Amundsen would be back soon, but in addition, these voiced calls for sending help. The idea of sending help had been voiced since day three of the expedition from abroad, and in Norway from the second week. NLF officially asked for a rescue operation on Saturday 5 June 1925.²⁷⁵ At the time, there were plans for three different expeditions to look for the polar explorers. The fourth group of articles relate to the preparation for the safety expeditions and re-runs of earlier articles and background material on other polar explorers. The dominant view was positive, but worried.

As people began considering the idea of the expedition being lost, and most of the aviation world was scrambling to join a search, a sealer arrived at Kings Bay with the expedition participants. They had crash landed in the pack ice at 87° 44' north and had spent weeks attempting to get airborne. At the last attempt on the day that had been declared as the point of no return, they managed to get airborne. They were forced to land at Nordaustlandet and were

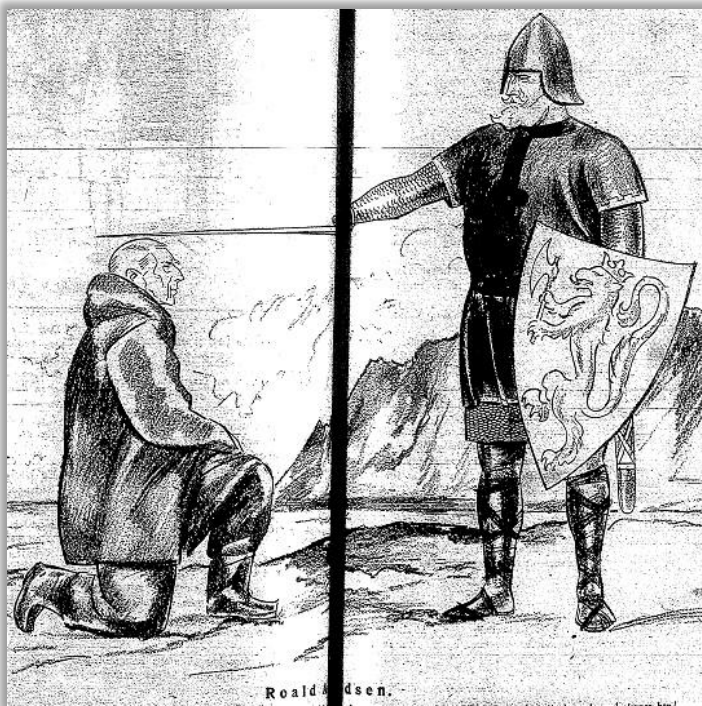
²⁷³ Not signed. "Flisespikkeri: Roald Amundsen, Martin Tranmæl." *Hvepsen*. Year 20. No 12. Saturday, 25 April 1925. Original italics.

²⁷⁴ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 391.

²⁷⁵ Not signed. "Luftseiladsforeningen vedtar sammen med sakyndige en samlet plan for sikringsforanstaltningerne for polflyverne" *Tidens Tegn*. Year 16. No 129. Monday, 8 June 1925.

spotted, by pure chance, by a sealer. The crew left the airplane in a bay and sailed back to Kings Bay. Later the airplane was retrieved and flown back to Kings Bay.

The crew returned after 24 days in “the realm of death”, as it was aptly called by Bomann-Larsen.²⁷⁶ The return was launched in the media on 19 June 1925, with the same article signed by Roald Amundsen, and depending on the newspaper, there were various amounts of other polar news as well.²⁷⁷ After the failed attempt at the North Pole, the expedition members were received as heroes in Norway. When Amundsen’s expedition had disappeared, the navy vessel *Farm* and two naval airplanes were used in the search. The funding for this safety expedition was approved without debate.²⁷⁸²⁷⁹ *Hvepsen* was critical to the increase of Amundsen’s national salary, which was raised to an annual sum of NOK 12,000. “Why? Because he did not find the [North] Pole?”²⁸⁰ *Karikaturen* appears to have been glad that their Amundsen had returned: “(...) our anxiety and longing has been remunerated, our fear with joy has been fully repaid (...)”²⁸¹ Another member of the comic press, *Korsaren*, writes a honorary text that gives the impression that Roald Amundsen had gone to war, “Six brave



warriors are welcomed back (...).”²⁸² *Korsaren* writes that they had fought for 24 days with the “never-ending wave of ice” near the Pole. The expedition returned, flying, and “Mother Norway wept in joy to have such sons back,” and in a two-page caricature Roald Amundsen appears to be knighted by a Norwegian Viking.²⁸³

Hvepsen continued to stand against Amundsen’s expedition, on the grounds that it was not scientific. It

²⁷⁶ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 394. Author’s translation.

²⁷⁷ Roald Amundsen. “Kom til Kings Bay i god behold klokken et” *Tidens Tegn, Dagbladet, Aftenposten*. Friday 19 June 1925.

²⁷⁸ Stortingsforhandling 7b 1925. 2343.

²⁷⁹ Not Signed. “Polheltene: Lysere tider.” *Hvepsen*. Year 20. No 17. Saturday, 4 July 1925.

²⁸⁰ Sverre Wegenor. “Ukens film.” *Hvepsen*. Year 20. No 18. Saturday, 18 July 1925.

²⁸¹ Quixote “Midtsommer-verse” *Karikaturen*. Year 9. No 24. Wednesday, 24 June 1925.

²⁸² Lazarus. “Vi hilser” *Korsaren*. Year 32. No 24. Wednesday, 24 June 1925.

²⁸³ Lazarus. “Vi hilser” *Korsaren*. Year 32. No 24. Wednesday, 24 June 1925.

also criticized the expedition for filling the newspapers with advertisements for all the different industrial products that had been “instrumental” in securing a happy outcome of the expedition. The magazine was sceptical to the commercialization that was going on. Other magazines in the comic press were not critical, both *Karikaturen* and *Korsaren* seem to be positive toward the expedition. In essence, the pre-phase and disappearance of the expedition were dominated by positive coverage. Although the expedition was lost, there was no negative news printed on the expedition, with the exception of *Hvepsen*. The two major items of importance that were not printed in any media, was first that Amundsen was a paid employee of a company that bore his name, owned by the NLF, which was the real power behind the expedition. Second, that the expedition had failed to complete its goal: to reach the North Pole. The expedition turned from sensational polar stunt to sensational survivor drama.

Amundsen and his expeditions may have been used to further the agenda of the Norwegian government and the newspaper *Tidens Tegn*. Ida Blom writes in *Kampen om Eirik Raudes Land* that the newspaper and its editor Thommessen were both pro-Fascist²⁸⁴ and identifies Rolf Thommessen as an influential member of a pressure group working on claiming Greenland for the Norwegian cause, and which had done so since 1923.²⁸⁵ Henrik P. Thommessen writes in *Fra triumf til tragedie* that Rolf Thommessen was a supporter of several political parties, namely Frisinnede Venstre, Høyre and Fedrelandslaget.²⁸⁶ Henrik P. Thommessen also writes that Rolf Thommessen had a romantic opinion of Greenland as an “ancient part” of the nation-state Norway.²⁸⁷ Blom states that *Tidens Tegn* was the most enthusiastic newspaper in voicing the view that Norway should acquire Greenland.²⁸⁸ Rolf Thommessen’s involvement in the expedition may have been influenced by his political conviction to make Greenland Norwegian, and it is probable that he used Amundsen and his popularity to boost the views of his lobby group, thus furthering his own agenda. It can be claimed that the close cooperation between the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight and *Tidens Tegn* may have caused more interest in other polar activities.

The enthusiasm for all matters polar that the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight created through the media frenzy, may have strengthened the perception that the Arctic was where Norway belonged and should expand. The expedition might have inspired the trend of

²⁸⁴ Blom. *Kampen om Eirik Raudes land*. 1973. 316.

²⁸⁵ Blom. *Kampen om Eirik Raudes land*. 1973. 316.

²⁸⁶ Thommessen. *Fra triumf til tragedie*. 2009. 155.

²⁸⁷ Thommessen. *Fra triumf til tragedie*. 2009. 155.

²⁸⁸ Blom. *Kampen om Eirik Raudes land*. 1973. 206.

nationalistic expansion, which later evolved into what has been termed the Norwegian polar imperialism. In addition to a media-fuelled source of inspiration, there appears to have been a political will to support the expedition, as it may have been beneficial to the Norwegian government's agenda of planting the Norwegian flag in the Arctic.

The Norwegian government had an established mode of operation in regard to Amundsen, where the government had supported him time and again without debate and with a unanimous vote. This can be interpreted as a way to show national interest in the Arctic and as a way to continue and nourish the cultural idea of a polar nation.

The Norwegian government was involved in the expedition on many different levels. The direct support was the supply ship *Farm*. The Norwegian government made the ship available to the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight and to an expedition by Adolf Hoel to study the geological formations on Spitsbergen. The loan of *Farm* was worth NOK 25,000, and was paid by the government of Norway.²⁸⁹ The debate on funding *Farm* and allowing the ship to be used in Roald Amundsen's expedition was extensive and sheds light on many issues.

Those members who were against the funding considered the expedition to be "sportsmanlike", and that it was a private initiative and it should remain so, as the government had little funds to spare. One member claimed that giving Amundsen these funds was likely to send him to his grave, as airplanes were unsafe.

Those who were inclined to fund the expedition claimed that they saw the NOK 25,000 not only as a contribution, but also as a sign of confidence in Roald Amundsen. One member, Karl Wilhelm Wefring²⁹⁰, claimed that the Storting should not forget what Amundsen had done for Norway in the past. Amundsen's achievement of being the first man through the Northwest Passage, the Northeast Passage, and the conqueror of the South Pole, had turned Norway into a famous and respected nation. Was this the time to fail him? Wefring claimed that if the funds were not donated, the world would see it as a sign of lack of confidence in Roald Amundsen and his expedition, and this would not be "understood" abroad.²⁹¹

Another member of the Storting, Carl Joachim Hambro, claimed that if Amundsen planted the Norwegian flag on the North Pole, and the Storting had not funded part of the expedition,

²⁸⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Marinen +Fr-: Letter to NLF from Det Kongelige Forsvarsdepartement, F.D.M.I J. Nr. 411/25, dated 31. March 1925.

²⁹⁰ Karl Wilhelm Wefring, Minister of Defence, 1920–1921, 1923–1924 and 1926. Representative from Oslo Frisinnede Venstre 1925–1927; Store Norske Leksikon "Karl Wilhelm Wefring" Store Norske Leksikon. No copyright. URL: http://snl.no/Karl_Wilhelm_Wefring (10.11.2011).

²⁹¹ Wefring Stortingsforhandlinger 7a 1925. 645.

Norway would not be able to claim that the North Pole as a matter of interest for the Norwegian nation. Hambro explicitly looked at the funds as a national-political issue and not as a personal gift to Roald Amundsen.²⁹² Hambro's statements must be viewed in light of his book *Norske Næringsinteresser på Grønland* (*Norwegian commercial interests in Greenland*), where he states that Norway had had and continued to have historical and national reasons to dispute a Danish claim to Greenland.²⁹³

The prime minister, Johan Ludvig Mowinckel, stated that he did not see Roald Amundsen's expedition as a "sport deed," as he stated: "(...) Even there, something bigger and different is at the core."²⁹⁴ He also stated that Amundsen's actions connected Norway with the Arctic, where Norway now had considerable interests. In the opinion of the prime minister, Amundsen was, besides Nansen, the man whose deeds had shown that Norway had considerable interests in the Arctic. Mowinckel also claimed that Norway and the Norwegian people were so closely tied up with Roald Amundsen that a "no" would "not be understood in the world". In short, Norway could not say no to fund Roald Amundsen's expedition.²⁹⁵ The funding was approved with 87 votes for and 54 votes against.²⁹⁶ Amundsen had lost the ultimate sign of approval: a unanimous vote. But he was still supported by a majority.

Wefring, Hambro and Mowinckel were all powerful political figures in their day and age, and the debate shows that these powerful members of Norwegian politics considered it vital that Roald Amundsen received support for his expedition based on national political interests. The prime minister stated that Roald Amundsen and Norway was virtually one. This may be interpreted as Roald Amundsen in some ways being a part of Norwegian foreign policy. This was, however, not the only direct support the government gave the expedition.

There was considerably more cooperation between the expedition and the Norwegian government, but these issues were not discussed. For a start, the expedition received certain benefits saving the expedition a lot of expenses, such as custom duties. All goods marked as a

²⁹² Stortingsforhandlinger 7a 1925. 647–648.

²⁹³ Hambro, Carl Joachim. *Norske Næringsinteresser paa Grønland en oversigt*. Kristiania: H. Aschehoug & Co, 1924. 5–7, 48.

²⁹⁴ Stortingsforhandlinger 7a 1925. 652.

²⁹⁵ Stortingsforhandlinger 7a 1925. 652.

²⁹⁶ Stortingsforhandlinger 7a 1925. 659; Not signed. "Stortinget stiller "Farm" til disposisjon for Amundsen." *Tidens Tegn*. Year 16. No 71. Wednesday, 25 March 1925.

part of the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight were duty-free.²⁹⁷ This was a request from the NLF, approved by the Royal Department of Finance and Customs.²⁹⁸

The import of the airplanes was duty-free, but the planes still had to be registered in Norway and be approved as fit to fly. This posed a problem, as it would take a lot of time to find an expert and have him come to Spitsbergen to inspect the airplanes and approve their status of airworthiness. The solution was to ask if the expedition's pilot, Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, could approve the airworthiness of the airplanes. A letter from Forsvarsdepartementets Luftfartsråd (The Defence Ministry's Aviation Council) to the NLF states that there was a lot of missing information in the registration forms they had received, and they also noted that the NLF had asked if Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen could be the man who approved the airworthiness of the two Dornier Wal airplanes. The department approved the airplanes' registration, and they accepted that Riiser-Larsen did the technical inspection on the grounds that he was employed by their administration and that he, as a member of the expedition, would be more interested in a flight-worthy airplane than any other person the department could appoint as inspector.²⁹⁹ The airplanes were approved by Riiser-Larsen. In a later letter sent by the department, which also contained the formal airworthiness certificates, the department stated that due to all the missing information, the certificates were only valid for the duration of the polar flight and had to be reissued if the planes were to fly in mainland Norway.³⁰⁰

Amundsen was also used in Norwegian propaganda, as correspondence found in the NLF archives show that the Norwegian government used the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight to show the world "what it is to be Norwegian and what Norway is."³⁰¹ Tor Bomann-Larsen writes that a government employee at the Norwegian legation in London continuously handed over information on a possible competitor to Rolf Thommessen.³⁰² Another aspect of political assistance was that the Norwegian government used its influence in Spitsbergen to deny a journalist from a competing media organ, the Associated Press, access to the telegraph station

²⁹⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Fi Letter to NLF from Distriktstollinspektøren i det søndenfjeldske grænsetolldistrikt, dated 9 February 1925.

²⁹⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Fi Letter to NLF from Det kongelige finans- og tolddepartement, dated 6 February 1925.

²⁹⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Arméen – luftartsrådet, letter to Forsvarsdepartementets Luftfartsråd from Det Kongelige Forsvars-departement Arméen. J.Nr. 506/25.5, dated 27 April 1925; NLF was informed in a letter from Forsvarsdepartementets Luftfartsråd, dated 30 April 1925.

³⁰⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Arméen – luftartsrådet. Letter from Forsvarsdepartementets Luftfartsråd to NLF, dated 10 June 1925.

³⁰¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XX:U-Utenriksdepartementet: Letter from Legation de Norwege to Utenriksdepartementet, from F. Herman Gade (No 174), dated 20 July 1925.

³⁰² Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 388. Kristian Presterud worked with the legation in London.

at Kings Bay when the Amundsen-Ellsworth expedition disappeared. The last, but far from the least sign of cooperation was that the Norwegian government issued an order to Amundsen and his men to claim any land they found in the name of His Majesty the King of Norway.

To cover the remaining expenses, NLF would seek advances from the media, and to make sure they would receive income after the expedition, they made plans to make a film, book and arrange lectures. This helps show the commercial nature of the expedition, besides the close cooperation with the newspapers. The nature of the financing also shows that the expedition became decreasingly related to science and increasingly related to sensation and sport. During the expedition, they filmed what happened. The raw footage was cut into a film, “The polar film”. The rights to the film distribution for the 1925 Amundsen-Ellsworth expedition were sold to J. Chr. Gundersen. His contract with NLF allowed him to use two copies of the film, and the income from tickets and advertisements were to be split, with 70% going to the NLF and 30% to Gundersen.³⁰³ Gundersen’s work with the film resulted in an income of NOK 35,700 from Norway alone. Abroad, Gundersen was less fortunate. He declined an offer of USD 50,000 for the world rights from First National Films. He stated that more could be had from selling the film rights to individual countries. However, further correspondence show that this did not go as Gundersen had thought it would. The end result was that he sold the rights for the film to Pathe for USD 20,000, with rights for Canada, Argentina and the US, while he used First National to distribute “The polar film” to the rest of the world, having both parties receive a 50–50 split of the income.³⁰⁴ One of the reasons they accepted the USD 20,000 offer from Pathe, was that they feared that the MacMillan Expedition might reach the North Pole, disrupting the sales and interest in the NLF and Amundsen’s “polar film”, which after all only depicted an attempt at the North Pole, not a successful conquest.³⁰⁵ Although there were missed opportunities, NLF still managed to acquire a substantial amount of money from “The polar film”, but not as much as NLF might have wished for. The film was a direct commercial and sensational move to boost income, and its scientific value was nil.

³⁰³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:VIII:G:Gr-: Contract between Rolf Thommessen and J. Chr. Gundersen, dated 24 June 1925.

³⁰⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:VIII:G:Gr-: Letter to NLF from J. Chr. Gundersen on sale of first polar film and of planned sale of second polar film, dated 9 March 1926.

³⁰⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XV:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Telegram from Rolf Thommessen to Arnold Ræstad, dated 19 August 1925.

Another source of income from the expedition's aftermath was lectures. Lectures were a major source of income in the 1920's, and it was traditional for polar explorers to travel the world and give lectures, for a fee, to those who were interested in hearing what had transpired during their voyages. It was yet another commercial move used to make polar explorers rich and famous abroad. Amundsen was not the first, and he was not the last to embark on a lecture tour. After the 1925 expedition, which was honestly a close brush with death, there was tremendous interest in hearing what had happened and how they had managed to survive from the horse's mouth. In the early autumn of 1925, Amundsen was on a tour of the major capitals in Europe before launching a grand tour of the USA, but before that, he had a smaller tour in Britain. The Lecture Agency, led by Gerald Christy, informed the NLF that Amundsen would fetch as much as GBP 100 for each lecture.³⁰⁶ Each lecture was worth NOK 2,500. In comparison, a common worker in Norway earned about NOK 350 a month.³⁰⁷ Amundsen's British tour was short. In five days, he held seven lectures, each at GBP 100.³⁰⁸ The deal made with the Lecture Agency called for them to receive 10% of the sum, and the NLF would receive the rest. Later that year, in November, Leif Dietrichson cooperated with the Lecture Agency to set up a tour of the smaller cities in Britain.³⁰⁹ In the USA where lectures were the preferred way of hearing of expeditions, Lee Keedick, a well-known manager of explorers, was Amundsen's manager. He was on a contract with the NLF for the autumn of 1925. The deal included that Keedick paid all expenses and that the NLF received 60% of the profit from the lecture tour. The contract for the tour was signed in March 1925 by Rolf Thommessen, Roald Amundsen and Lee Keedick.³¹⁰ The tour began in Carnegie Hall in New York, and continued across the USA. The plan was for Amundsen to tour the nation until June 1926, but the plans for a new expedition made that difficult. Instead, Amundsen was released from his obligation by Keedick in March, with the understanding that he was to continue his lectures in the US after the 1926 expedition was finished.³¹¹ The lectures were to continue from October

³⁰⁶ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:L:La-Li: Letter from Gerald Christy (The Lecture Agency) to Arnold Ræstad, dated 10 July 1925.

³⁰⁷ Norsk Statistisk Sentralbyrå. "Det Statistiske Centralbyrå. *Lønninger 1925–1926*." Norsk Statistisk Sentralbyrå. Copyright Norsk Statistisk Sentralbyrå URL: http://www.ssb.no/histstat/nos/nos_vii_082.pdf (10.10.2011)

³⁰⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:L:La-Li: Letter from Gerald Christy (The Lecture Agency) to Arnold Ræstad, dated 11 August 1925.

³⁰⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:L:La-Li: Letter from Gerald Christy to Arnold Ræstad NLF, dated 8 September 1925.

³¹⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:X:K: Memorandum of agreement between Lee Keedick and Norsk Luftseiladsforenings aktieselskap for Amundsen-Ellsworths polflyvning 1925, signed 9 March 1925 (in USA) and 16 April 1925 (in Norway).

³¹¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:X:K: Telegram from L. Keedick to NLF, dated 13 August 1925.

1926 to March 1927, in order to fulfil the contract of 1925.³¹² That Amundsen was away on a very long lecture tour would have considerable impact on the next expedition, as he became even less critical to the completion of the expedition.

The last major source of income was the book on the expedition. The Norwegian expedition members wrote a book on their adventures called *Flukten til 88° Nord*, which was a longer and more elaborate version of what had been printed in the news. There are no known documents showing what the book sold or any contracts on the book, but it was reported to have sold out the first 6,000 books before lunch on the first day of sale, and that the next 7,000 copies were in print.³¹³ The book was well received in Norway, where Olaf Holtedahl, a renowned professor of geology, reviewed it.³¹⁴ There are no figures showing how much income the expedition received from the sales of the book, but it may have been a considerable amount.

The book raises other questions. How was it received outside of Norway and how does it describe the goal of the expedition? Was the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight related to science? The participants in the expedition did claim that the expedition was scientific in nature. Lincoln Ellsworth wrote in *Problems of Polar Research* that the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight's scientific results were "viewing 120,000 square miles of hitherto unknown territory and the taking of two soundings (...) which showed the depth of the polar basin at that point to be 3,750 meters (...)." ³¹⁵ The expedition did not use scientific methods in the uncovering of the vast tracts of sea and ice they unveiled, they did not photo-document the journey and they made few measurements. According to Roald Berg, the expedition was not scientific, and he quotes the British Geographical Journal's claim that the expedition was "a story of astonishingly good fortune."³¹⁶ Robert Marc Friedman writes that Amundsen's attempt to explore with an airplane seemed less promising in relation to making

³¹² NBO Ms. 4° 2401:X:K: Letter from L. Keedick to NLF, dated 16 October 1925.

³¹³ Not signed. "Kolossal efterspørsel efter boken om polflyvningen." *Tidens Tegn*. Year 16. No 236. Monday 12 October 1925; Brynhi, Inge. "Olaf Holtedahl" Store Norske Leksikon. Copyright Store Norske Leksikon. URL: http://snl.no/.nbl_biografi/Olaf_Holtedahl/utdypning (10.11.2011).

³¹⁴ Olaf Holtedahl "Roald Amundsen: "Gjennem luften til 88° nord" *Tidens Tegn*. Year 16. No 236. Saturday, 10 October 1925.

³¹⁵ Ellsworth, Lincoln "Arctic Flying Experiences by Airplane and Airship" in W.L.G. Joerg (ed) *Problems of Polar Research A series of papers by thirty-one authors. American Geographical society special publication No. 7* New York: American Geographical Society, 1928. 411–412.

³¹⁶ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 249.

observations.³¹⁷ Observation is a key part of the scientific method. In short, the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight was not scientific; it was a sensational and sportsmanlike venture.

While the book was, as mentioned, a huge success in Norway cooler heads read the book in England. Gerald Tinney wrote a contemporary review of both *My Polar Flight* (England) and *Our Polar Flight* (USA), and wrote: “The book itself helps us little: written at top speed to fulfil a contract, it lacks mature consideration, and can in no sense be regarded as constructive.”³¹⁸ Not promising words on a book that sold the entire first edition during the first day in Norway. The review also reveals how the expedition was seen from abroad: Not as a national political achievement or a heroic deed, but as a something of a failure, with commercial overtones.

If from the geographical standpoint this plan [Polar Flight] was poorly conceived, the success of the venture could be regarded as so much capital, with which to back the more difficult and worthier venture of flying from Spitsbergen to Alaska over the inaccessible zone of the Beaufort Sea, and it would at the same time be a personal and national triumph over previous misfortunes. We must realize how greatly Amundsen was hampered by the conventions of a sensation seeking press, on whom he largely depended for the finance of his expedition. (...) It [The expedition] is the practical demonstration of the difficulties of aircraft for long journeys of polar discovery, which gives value to the 1925 Polar Flight.³¹⁹

According to Ginney, the international use of the expedition was to learn of the difficulties of flying in the Arctic, not to study Norwegian heroics. As a final verdict over the expedition, the review sums it up in a few lines:

Between them N.24 and N.25 had been in the air for approximately twenty-five hours over the polar basin. During this period they had three forced landings, but in each case on water. How amazingly fortunate they were, and how exceedingly unreliable the very best aeroplanes are, as yet!³²⁰

The magazine *Motoring and Aviation* names the Amundsen-Ellsworth expedition as a “Splendid Failure”, where the heroics were confined to “(...) chopping an air-plane out of the Polar ice, levelling a starting field, and flying back in eight hours to contact with civilization.”³²¹ To further demonstrate the level of commercialism that defined the expedition, one can look at how *N25* was used to bring further profit into the treasury. After

³¹⁷ Friedman. *Norsk Polarhistorie II*. 2004. 160.

³¹⁸ Binney, Georg. “Roald Amundsen’s Polar Flight: Review” in *The Geographical Journal*. Vol. 67. No. 3. March 1926.(253-259). 254.

³¹⁹ Binney. *The Geographical Journal*. 1926. 254.

³²⁰ Binney. *The Geographical Journal*. 1926. 259.

³²¹ NBO: Brevs 812:4:Avisutklipp 1905–1939: Article in *Motoring and Aviation*. “Amundsens splendid failure”, not signed, unknown issue, no date, 1925.

the expedition, *N25* was used in raising additional funds for the upcoming expedition by flying from place to place in Norway, being exhibited at local fairs. The pilot Omdal flew the airplane from fair to fair.³²² Lincoln Ellsworth was asked if the airplane should be shipped to the USA, where it could be used to bring in further funds, but he replied: “Feel that news of trying to exploit our plane at Coney Island would not react well with the public at this time (...) it simply means connecting cheap commercialism with the high ideals that everyone knows was the spirit of our adventure.”³²³ The way the expedition was financed did not reflect the views of Lincoln Ellsworth. As it is, “The polar film”, the lectures and the book show that the expedition was commercial in nature. In the words of Ginney, the expedition was “so much capital” that they could use it to fund the next expedition. So how much capital did they accumulate?

The financial status of the Amundsen-Ellsworth Transpolar Flight was strong, according to the NLF. In a confidential economic overview, the total expenses of the expedition were estimated at NOK 500,000, and the income to NOK 900,000, which would give the company an estimated surplus of NOK 400,000. Later, when an accountant looked at the books in December 1925, it turned out that the expenses were closer to one million kroner. Thus, the expedition was insolvent. It had been projected that the old expedition would have enough profit to fund the new expedition, but the accountant claimed that this was not the case. Despite the massive effort put down by a host of different sources, the profit was merely NOK 60,000.³²⁴ This money was to fund the next expedition, but they were not available, so logically A/S Roald Amundsen’s *Polflyvning 1925* was insolvent. However, this was only temporary, as there was income due that would cover the running expenses. The fact that made the company absolutely insolvent was that the accountant pointed out some financial irregularities, such as the stock capital of the company. The capital was NOK 2,000, of which NOK 1,500 had not been paid. He pointed out that this was not a major issue, but it had to be fixed immediately.³²⁵

The Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight has been proclaimed as a successful geographic discovery, but in reality, it was a media event that turned into a real-time survivor drama, a “heroic failure” which made Amundsen and his friends heroes in Norway. This was in large

³²² NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII:No-Norske: Letter from NLF to Norsk Telegrambyrå A/S, dated 12 September 1925.

³²³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:VI: E: Telegram from Ellsworth to Thommessen, not dated.

³²⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:III:Økonomi: Accountant report of A/S Amundsen-Ellsworths polflyvning 1925, dated 19 January 1926.

³²⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:III:Økonomi: Accountant report of A/S Amundsen-Ellsworths polflyvning 1925, dated 19 January 1926.

part due to the media picture created, but also due to the nature of the drama of man against nature. But the expedition did not achieve anything substantial, nor did it complete its purpose, which was to raise funds for a larger and more worthy expedition; what was to become the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transarctic Flight.

4

The Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transarctic Flight

“In 1826, the first steamship came to Norway – in 1926, the first airship (...) both characterize the rapid pace of progress during the last 100 years.”³²⁶

The Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight was Amundsen’s first successful expedition after his conquest of the South Pole. It was also the shortest in duration. As Amundsen continued to strive for popular success, he and the expedition became involved with commercial and political considerations that made it the most controversial expedition of his career. Amundsen wanted to be the first man to cross the polar basin from Spitsbergen to Alaska. The Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight did not become transarctic, first due to restraints from the NLF, and ultimately due to technological failure. After the 1925 flight, Amundsen and the NLF started cooperating again, this time seeking success with an airship. This resulted in the expedition named the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transarctic Flight. But even something as mundane as the name of the expedition came with political strings attached.³²⁷

The issue of who was considered important for the organization of the expedition and who was responsible varies in the primary sources, literature and historical research. Bomann-Larsen describes the expedition as an international corporation in which Amundsen was a CEO. The expedition was based on his name and prestige, but Amundsen was not part of the day-to-day business and he had no control over events whatsoever.³²⁸

Roald Berg views the aspect of time as important, and states that the expedition was a technical system where technology and technicians were the key members, and where the international press had a major impact on the funding. Berg also states that the expedition was

³²⁶ Not signed. “Norges besøk i Oslo” *Aftenposten*. Year 67. No 185. Thursday, 15 April 1926. 2. Author’s translation.

³²⁷ The expedition was named the Amundsen-Ellsworth- Nobile Transpolar Flight in March 1926.

³²⁸ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 427.

so large that no single person was critical to it, and that no single person was aware of every detail of the expedition.³²⁹ Alexander Wisting describes Thommessen as having the administrative responsibilities as well as the difficult task of devising a plan while Amundsen, Ellsworth, and Riiser-Larsen all were busy elsewhere.³³⁰

Thommessen described the airship venture in his litigation against Amundsen. Thommessen considered what later became the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight as a continuation of the contracts and an expansion of the company that had organized the previous expedition. Even though Thommessen personally did not want to continue the cooperation, he did so in order to retain continuity within the administration.³³¹ Thommessen claims he accepted the responsibility of negotiating all the press rights and publishing rights.³³² The daily business activities to arrange the expedition were conducted by Thommessen, Arnold Ræstad, Alf Bryn,³³³ or Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen. Amundsen was off on a lecture tour and did not participate in any of the preparations.³³⁴ That Amundsen was not involved in the planning of the expedition, and not present in any meaningful way, would have consequences for the expedition as a whole.

The various versions of events are also apparent in the decision to use an airship for the expedition. There is a consensus on the importance of Nobile and the airship the Italian state possessed, but how he was contacted and why, varies. The differences may at first appear trivial, but they show that there are still uncertainties regarding what happened and why. These uncertainties also open up the area for more research. The literature on can be divided into five main categories describing what happened and why.

First is the official account of the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. The account states that before the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight's take-off in 1925, the expedition participants had decided that they were to attempt the pole by airship in 1926 and would consider the 1925 expedition as a reconnaissance mission. It was also claimed that Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen had met Nobile and informed and convinced the rest of the expedition at

³²⁹ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 250, 254-255.

³³⁰ Wisting, *Roald Amundsen*, 2011. 452-453.

³³¹ NBO Ms. Fol 2640 Rolf Thommessen. (I). 12.

³³² NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Rolf Thommessen. (I). 26.

³³³ Alf Bryn. Secretary for Norsk Luftseiladsforening, known as patent engineer, author and renowned golf player; Bryn, Knut, "Alf Bryn", Store Norske Leksikon. Copyright Store Norske Leksikon. URL: http://snl.no/nbl_biografi/Alf_Bryn/utdypning (1.11.2011)

³³⁴ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Rolf Thommessen. (I) 27.

Spitsbergen, prior to take off, to contact Nobile on their return and use his airship.³³⁵ This view can also be found in *Fartherst North*³³⁶ and Kåre Berg's *Polarheltene*,³³⁷ both of which largely base their conclusions on Amundsen's official version.

Second are the accounts from the biographers Bomann-Larsen and Wisting, who claim that Amundsen knew of Nobile, met him in Italy and test flew the airship that later became the *Norge*.³³⁸

Third is the modern historical research done by Roald Berg, who claims that there was a choice involved, and that Amundsen looked at the available modes of transportation and made a choice after the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight to disregard both a larger airplane and a giant Zeppelin. In Berg's opinion, Amundsen preferred a smaller Italian airship.³³⁹

Fourth is the account that came from Odd Arnesen, a journalist from *Aftenposten*, who claims that Amundsen needed a piece of technology, namely an airship with a crew, and found and bought it in Italy. Arnesen does not consider any other options nor mention any.³⁴⁰

The fifth and certainly most common version is represented by Steinar Aas³⁴¹, who skips the problem altogether and begin his account after Nobile has arrived in Norway. It can be found in most books that give an account of the last of Roald Amundsen's expeditions, including international literature such as *Airships in international affairs*.³⁴²

There does not appear to be significant differences between the accounts, but they become apparent as one look at the different accounts in view of their origin and use of sources. Amundsen's official account was written in 1927, while he was in hostile litigation with Norsk Luftseiladsforening and open conflict with Nobile. As such, his book must be considered part of that process, and any statement of who knew whom, must be considered unreliable. Neither Bomann-Larsen nor Wisting describe the source where it is stated that Amundsen knew and had met Nobile, which opens the question to speculation, did Amundsen really know Nobile? Odd Arnesen's type of account appears immediately after the expedition was completed, and was written as homage to Amundsen and as a defence against the Italian

³³⁵ Amundsen, Roald. *Den første flukt over polhavet*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1926. 10.

³³⁶ Holland, Clive (ed) *Farthest North*. London: Robinson, 1994.

³³⁷ Berg, *Polarheltene*, 2003. 159.

³³⁸ Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 412; Wisting. *Roald Amundsen*, 2011. 442–443.

³³⁹ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 250–251.

³⁴⁰ Arnesen, Odd. *"Norge" færden bak kulissene* Oslo: Tønsbergs Forlag, 1926. 12–13.

³⁴¹ Aas, Steinar. *Umberto Nobile: Polarhelt eller svikar?* Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2002.

³⁴² Duggan and Meyer. *Airships in international affairs, 1890–1940*. 2001. 118–119.

propaganda usage of the expedition. The Aas type of approach does not take into account the complicated situation that existed and why the choice fell on Nobile, and as such it is not able to clarify that point. Berg appears as the one of few authors who are able or willing to show where the evidence can be found in archival sources.

The different types of account show that depending on motive, perspective and sources, it is difficult to state factually something as trivial as how one central figure knew another central figure. What other and more important subjects have been treated in a similar manner? There is no consensus on details and nuance, and this opens the subject for further research.

The Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile expedition was facing fierce competition, as *Time Magazine* stated that at the time, eleven expeditions had plans to reach the North Pole.³⁴³ *Time Magazine* cites Amundsen as claiming that any new airplane expeditions had a one in 1500 chance to succeed, but that his airship expedition had a 100 per cent chance of success.³⁴⁴ The competitors also involved a number of well-known figures, including Fridtjof Nansen, who had joined forces with the German Zeppelin company through the scientific organization Aeroarctic. The Americans were also planning to use their airship *Shenandoah* in an expedition to the North Pole led by Admiral Moffett. The British also planned an expedition with their airship *R34*. The only nation available that had not scheduled an expedition was Italy, which happened to have a finished airship, *NI*. Formally, it belonged to the Italian king Emanuel III. The airship's constructor was Umberto Nobile,³⁴⁵ working in Fascist Italy. Airships were uncommon and possessed symbolic value as items of prestige and symbols of national progress. Very few nations had the economy and resources to acquire an airship. Airships catered to governments and had, in their day and age, strategic value as military assets. As such, they were objects that were politically sensitive. In comparison, Germany was forced to cease constructing airships as part of its forced de-militarization after the defeat in the First World War. Airships were targeted because of their use in strategic bombing.³⁴⁶ Italy, which had been a part of the Entente, was still able to produce these giants. That A/S

³⁴³ NBO: Brevs 812:4: Avisutklipp 1905–1939. Unkown author, *Time*, Science, "Northward Ho!". March 15 1926. 20.

³⁴⁴ NBO: Brevs 812:4: Avisutklipp 1905–1939. Unkown author, *Time*, Science, "Northward Ho!". March 15 1926. 20.

³⁴⁵ Umberto Nobile, 1885–1978. Airship designer and constructor in Italy, co-leader during Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. Led an airship expedition with *Italia* to North Pole 1928, exiled from Italy after its crash. Worked in the Soviet Union making airships, returned to Italy after the Second World War. Compensated and reinstated as a general after the war. Authored numerous books on expeditions with *NI Norge* and *Italia*.

³⁴⁶ de Syon, *Zeppelin!* 2002. 106–108. 107.

Roald Amundsen Polflyvning 1925 was allowed to buy one on behalf of Roald Amundsen may indicate that on a symbolic level, Amundsen was sufficiently influential to acquire a strategic military and cultural-political resource cheaply from a head of state, Benito Mussolini.

Amundsen contacted Nobile on 15 July and arrived in Norway on 25 July 1925. The new expedition was planned at a meeting in the NFL, where Nobile was invited. He was to work with Amundsen, Arnold Ræstad, and Riiser-Larsen. The goal of the expedition is found in a letter from Ræstad to a bank, the Christiania Bank og Kreditkasse. In this letter, Ræstad describes that they intend to acquire an Italian navy airship from the Italian government. The plan called for the airship to be under the command of an Italian airship pilot, with a partially Italian crew. Most of the crew would be Norwegian, and the airship would fly under the Norwegian flag. The cost was estimated to NOK 1,850,000. The possible income was estimated to NOK 2,300,000.³⁴⁷ In order to fund this venture, it was decided that the profit from the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight, an estimated sum of about NOK 500,000, would be transferred to the new expedition, which was given the temporary name the Amundsen-Ellsworth Transpolar Flight. This financial estimate, made in August 1925, was found to be faulty in December 1925, as the surplus of the Amundsen-Ellsworth Transarctic Flight was in fact only NOK 60,000.³⁴⁸ With regard to the planned airship expedition, the accountant going through the books of the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight cautioned the board with the following words: "Since this whole affair represents a large economic responsibility and will stand or fall with the outcome of the expedition, I will insist on advising the largest possible caution with the company funds."³⁴⁹

The act of using the profits from one expedition to fund another also had the implication that the contracts concerning the sharing of profits and the previously agreed-upon job designations could and would be left unchanged.³⁵⁰ Lincoln Ellsworth donated USD 100,000 to the expedition, but not until he had made some demands. His full demands were: (1) that the expedition be called the Amundsen-Ellsworth Transarctic Flight, (2) that it should only carry only the Norwegian flag, (3) that he should be the only American aboard, (4) that the

³⁴⁷ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen (II) Bilag XIX (copy of letter from Arnold Ræstad to Christianias Bank og Kreditkasse).

³⁴⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:III:Økonomi: Accountant report of A/S Amundsen-Ellsworths polflyvning 1925, dated 19 January 1926.

³⁴⁹ NBO Ms 4° 2401:III:Økonomi: Accountant report of A/S Amundsen-Ellsworths polflyvning 1925, dated 19 January 1926.

³⁵⁰ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640. Thommesen. (I). 13.

final published material from the expedition was to be written by himself and Amundsen, (5) that his official connection and responsibility should be clearly defined,³⁵¹ and (6) that he would choose the American newspaper that would receive the right to publish news from the expedition – the *New York Times*. In the end, only the first, third and sixth terms were met.³⁵²

The clause regarding Ellsworth's responsibilities entailed that his contract was changed so that he would be the scientific leader and navigator. Originally, the plans called for using Leif Dietrichson as the actual navigator, but giving Ellsworth the credit. Dietrichson did not agree to this. He left or was forced to leave the expedition. He was afraid that all credit related to his work would go to Ellsworth in the case of a success, and that undue fault would fall on him in the case of a crash.³⁵³ In either case, the move did not make the news. Berg finds it less than probable that Dietrichson left the expedition due to "family considerations,"³⁵⁴ as was the official explanation.

Any profits from the expedition were to be divided according to the old contracts. The agreement was finalized at a meeting in the NLF on 15 August 1925. The stock company was also expanded to include future expeditions of Amundsen, and was renamed A/S Amundsen–Ellsworth polflyvning 1925.³⁵⁵ At 1 September 1925, the Italian government sold the airship to NLF.³⁵⁶ The two men signing the contract were Benito Mussolini and Roald Amundsen. The dictator Mussolini had made himself Air Marshal at the time, and his first official act in that role was to sell *NI* to Amundsen.³⁵⁷ The involvement of Mussolini would later have a major political impact on the expedition. Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen presented the expedition's official plans to the NLF at a general assembly held on 9 September, as Amundsen was not well and Ellsworth was in the USA.³⁵⁸

Rolf Thommessen was responsible for negotiating all the press rights and publishing rights. On 25 September 1925, Thommessen received a telegram informing him that the *New York Times* was willing to buy the exclusive rights for both North and South America for USD

³⁵¹ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen (II) Bilag XXV (copy of telegram from Ellsworth to Thommessen).

³⁵² Nobile was added to the name of the expedition, which was accepted by Ellsworth. Ellsworth was excluded from the final account and he did not have a fixed position besides leader.

³⁵³ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen (I). 17; Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 429–430; Berg *Norsk Polarhistorie I*, 2004. 253–254.

³⁵⁴ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I*. 2004. 253.

³⁵⁵ NBO Ms. Fol 2640. Thommessen (II) Bilag XX, XXI.

³⁵⁶ Ins. "Roald Amundsen har kjøpt det italienske luftskib "N.1"." *Aftenposten*. Year 66. No 453. Wednesday, 9 September 1925.

³⁵⁷ Bomann-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 422.

³⁵⁸ NBO Ms. Fol 2640 Thommessen (I). 14.

55,000 (NOK 248,000).³⁵⁹ According to Thommessen, this was a record sum, only beaten by Richard Evelyn Byrd's record sum of USD 65,000 for his flight to the North Pole.³⁶⁰ It is interesting that *The New York Times* considered an expedition to the North Pole such a good story that they were willing to pay USD 130,000 to make sure that they had the exclusive rights to the story in the USA. The contract stated that Amundsen and Ellsworth would submit three articles, one about the plan, a second on the preparations and a third from the journey. Also, the expedition would carry a reporter who would service all contracts. This journalist had to be approved by the NLF, and would send his news to the NLF, who would then distribute them to their customers simultaneously.³⁶¹ *The New York Times* agreed to this, and stated that the first third of the payment would arrive when they signed a contract, the second when the airship reached Spitsbergen and the last instalment when the airship reached Alaska.³⁶² The contracts were then drawn up and examined by Amundsen and Ellsworth (who were in the States), and if they approved, they would be cabled to Norway for approval by Thommessen, as legal entity.³⁶³ By 26 October 1925, the contracts were en-route in the mail, ready to be signed and approved.

While the American news rights were sold quite quickly, there was considerably more difficulty in finding anyone willing to buy the British rights. The North American Newspaper Alliance was tasked with selling the rights for Norsk Luftseiladsforening, and the man given this job was Hayden Church. Church had been asked to find a buyer for news from the expedition, at a price of GBP 4,000 (NOK 109,000), and made his inquiries in October and November 1925. Church believed that only seven newspapers had the finances to be able to buy the story, and these were all asked: *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Westminster Gazette*, *Daily News*, *Daily Express*, and *Daily Chronicle*. Church informed Thommessen that it had turned into a tough sell, as he writes:

³⁵⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XIIIIB New York Times. Telegram from Bircall (*New York Times*) to Thommessen, dated 25 September 1925.

³⁶⁰ Matuozzi, Robert. N. "Richard Byrd, Polar Exploration and the Media" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Vol. 110. No 2. Richard E. Byrd and the legacy of Polar Exploration (2002).

³⁶¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XIIIIB New York Times. Letter from James to Birchall, on Western Union Paper, not dated.

³⁶² NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XIIIIB New York Times. Telegram from *New York Times* to Rolf Thommesen, dated 20 October 1925.

³⁶³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XIIIIB New York Times. Copy of Cable on NY Times paper signed Birchall, not dated.

(...) the “Daily mail”, had previously told me on several occasions that he [the editor] and his associates have a low opinion of Amundsen’s personal character, and he reiterated their lack of confidence in Amundsen when I [Church] saw him on Friday last. (...) ³⁶⁴

Some newspapers were not interested in Amundsen’s story, such as the *Daily Telegraph*, who did not even want to place a bid³⁶⁵, and the *Daily Mail*, was not interested and thought the price asked was “out of the question”³⁶⁶. Most papers asked told Church that the price was too steep for any single newspaper. Church agrees to this in his letter to Thommessen. In a letter from *The Times* to Church, he was informed by the Managing Editor that the newspaper was not interested in a GBP 4,000 deal, they would only consider a syndicated offer.³⁶⁷ This would allow the papers to lessen their risk and economic burden by pooling together the fee asked. And this was indeed how the British rights were sold. The news rights in Great Britain and Ireland were sold to the United Newspapers (1918) Ltd for GBP 2,500,³⁶⁸ which was NOK 62,500³⁶⁹, a considerable sum of money, but not as high as the GBP 4,000 originally asked of the individual papers.

The North American Newspaper Alliance was also instrumental in selling the rights of the news to newspapers in continental Europe. The Alliance acted as an agent and gave the story for “free” (USD 1.00 was needed to make a legal contract) to members of the alliance, and sold the story to other newspapers. The sum raised by selling the news to European newspapers in this manner was about USD 8,750.³⁷⁰ Sweden, Denmark and Finland raised USD 4,000, and continental Europe raised the remaining USD 4,750. It was a considerable sum, but still no more than a little over half of the minimum estimated in advance.³⁷¹

Thommessen was the man in charge of the Norwegian contracts. There are no written or signed traces of the contracts with Norwegian newspapers in any part of the NLF archive.

³⁶⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Letter from Hayden Church to Rolf Thommessen, dated 3 November 1925.

³⁶⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Letter from The Daily Telegraph to Hayden Church, dated 29 October 1925.

³⁶⁶ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Letter from Douglas Crawford to Hayden Church, dated 2 November 1925.

³⁶⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Letter from *The Times*, to Hayden Church, dated 2 November 1925.

³⁶⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401 V: B: Ca-Ch. Contract between Norsk Luftseiladsforenings, A/S Amundsen-Ellsworths polflyvning 1925 and United Newspapers (1918) Ltd. Signed 31 December 1925.

³⁶⁹ In 1926, the average exchange rate was NOK 25.00 for 1.00 Pound Sterling, and NOK 4.50 for USD 1.00. Source: Norges Bank. "Historiske valutakurser" Norges Bank. Copyright Norges Bank. URL: <http://www.norges-bank.no/no/prisstabilitet/valutakurser/historiske-valutakurser/> (12.8.2011)

³⁷⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Newspaper Contracts. The total sums described evened up to about USD 8,750.

³⁷¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Estimated of newspaper income from North American Newspaper Alliance, dated October 26 1925. States that NLF hoped to raise between USD 13,800 (minimum) and USD 21,200 (maximum). Britain was expected at USD 15,000 (NOK 67,500).

Similarly, no statement evidence exists of what A/S Roald Amundsen-Ellsworth polflyvning 1925 made from selling the contracts in Norway. Indirect estimates can be based on a statement that one quarter of the amount from Norway was NOK 10,000. This implies that they managed to extract NOK 40,000 from the Norwegian newspapers.³⁷² It might also mean that they hoped to extract said sum from Norway. The only available “contract” is a series of letters between the NLF and the newspaper *Ofoten Tidende*, which was to pay NOK 300 for the media coverage in both *Ofoten Tidende* and *Fremover*. One set of photographs were sent to both newspapers, the pre-made stories were sent in duplicate and the telegrams with the latest developments were forwarded from another paper, *Nordland*, to keep the cost at an absolute minimum. This arrangement was the cheapest one available, as both papers only had two issues weekly and did not have the opportunity to profit from the news.³⁷³ In total, the media bought news from the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Expedition at a value of about USD 86,500, or NOK 390,000. This figure may be higher or lower.

Fredrik Ramm was once again hired as the official Norwegian correspondent aboard the airship, writing the news that the NLF was going to sell on behalf of A/S Amundsen-Ellsworth Polflyvning 1925. His wage was increased to NOK 800 a month, with free travel and board.³⁷⁴ His task was to write the articles about the expedition in order to fulfil the contracts and deliver the news that the NLF had sold the rights to, to the world media. His stories would form the basis for the media’s depiction of the expedition.

The *New York Times* was worried about their rival, The North American Newspaper Alliance (Alliance), who had bought the European rights. The *New York Times* feared that the Alliance would use their European rights in North and South America, including the USA, and break the monopoly bought by the *New York Times*. Thus, they insisted that all news were to be written in code, to which one of their correspondents had the key, so that their rivals, including the North American Newspaper Alliance, could not intercept news of the expedition.³⁷⁵ Thommessen sent his code to New York, where the Editor-in-Chief was able to study it. He replied to Thommessen that the Norwegian code was “dangerous”, as it was too complicated and intricate, so the *New York Times* would only allow the use of the code

³⁷²NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XXX:Økonomi: untitled document showing estimate of press contracts, not dated.

³⁷³NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XV:O-P-Q:Od-Om: Letter from Ofotens Tidende to NLF, dated 17. February 1926; Letter from NLF and Ofotens Tidende, dated 20 February 1926 and 3 March 1926.

³⁷⁴NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XVI:R:Ra-Ri: Contract between Fredrik Ramm and A/S Amundsen-Ellsworth Polflyvning 1925, dated 13 February 1926.

³⁷⁵NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIIIB: New York Times: Letters from *New York Times* to Rolf Thommessen, dates: 19 March 1926, 20 March 1926, telegram 20 March 1926 and reply telegram from Thommessen 20 March 1926.

employed by his own correspondent, COALTAR, which was simple, but sturdy. The Norwegians stated that they found it “weak”.³⁷⁶ How the media was engaged in fierce competition to publish first, and exclusively, is evidenced not only by the intense discussions about codes, but also from two other incidents. The first was an attempt by the United Press, which wished to break the monopoly on information by sending a correspondent to Kings Bay. His job was to report what he saw and heard to the Associated Press. People could not be stopped from entering Spitsbergen, but their transmissions could be stopped. The Associated Press was denied the use of the Kings Bay wireless transmitter and radio.³⁷⁷ The Associated Press protested on the exclusiveness of the news monopoly in an appeal to the Norwegian Minister H.H. Bryn³⁷⁸, who then suggested that the Norwegian government should spread the news to all correspondents, regardless of contractual agreements.³⁷⁹ This in turn made the *New York Times* react. It claimed that such an arrangement would render any future cooperation between press and Norwegian expeditions impossible. Without exclusive rights, the press would refuse to support the expeditions through contracts, as these would be unable to render any return on their investments.³⁸⁰ The NLF protested against this proposal, with the result that the Norwegian government did not allow anyone to use their wireless transmitters to “steal” the exclusive rights of the *New York Times* and the North American Newspaper Alliance.³⁸¹ A media monopoly was established and the Norwegian government was involved in its protection.

The Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight had 70 members directly involved when it left Norway. It was the largest aeronautical expedition attempted at the time. The scale and scope of the logistics were massive. The site where the expedition was to be based was a mining facility at Kings Bay, now Ny Ålesund. The mining facility belonged to the Norwegian government, which owned Kings Bay Kul Compani A/S.³⁸² Everything needed for the expedition had to be transported to this remote mining outpost at almost 80° North.

³⁷⁶ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Letter from NY Times to Thommessen, dated 19 March 1926 (Code needed); reply from Thommessen, dated 20 March 1926 (Supplies Norwegian code); telegram from NY Times, 8 April 1926 (Norwegian code too complex); Radio letter from NLF to NY Times, dated 9 April 1926.

³⁷⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII: North American-Ny: Telegram from NLF to The NY Times, dated 22 March 1926.

³⁷⁸ H. H. Bryn was Minister from Norway in Washington from 1910; *New York Times*, August 6, 1910. *New York Times*, Copyright *New York Times*. URL: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F10B1EFB395417738DDDAF0894D0405B808DF1D3> (26.10.2011)

³⁷⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:U-Utenriksdepartementet: Letter to Norsk Luftseiladsforening from Det Kgl.

Utenriksdepartement, letter dated 17 April 1926 with attachment marked “secret”, dated 24 March 1926.

³⁸⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIIIB: New York Times: Telegram from NY Times to NLF, dated 28 April 1926; reply from NLF 28 April 1928.

³⁸¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XIII B: Telegram from Aeroclubbpress (NLF) to Birchall, dated 28 April 1926.

³⁸² It is now called Store Norske and is still a state-owned company.

Nothing could be left to fate or chance, and everything had to be planned in advance. Correspondence from the NLF to various others indicate that the organization spent a considerable amount of manpower on acquiring information of what was available at Kings Bay and what could be borrowed, bought on site or had to be brought. Even the availability of electric power was a problem, as the expedition had to hire men to operate the local power plant.³⁸³ Those who would build the hangar for the airship needed accommodation, food, communication and equipment, and everything had to be planned in advance. When the last ship left Kings Bay in the autumn, the area was completely isolated, a virtual Arctic prison. The hangar for the airship, an essential building, was to be constructed by master carpenter F.R. Arild. He and a crew of 22 men were to build the hangar at Kings Bay between October 1925 and April 1926.³⁸⁴ All the signed contracts include a clause on the importance of secrecy and that no member was allowed to speak of any events until two years after the expedition's completion. The cost of the project was estimated to NOK 270,000.³⁸⁵ The work party left Trondheim on 14 October 1925, aboard the *Alekto*.³⁸⁶ As work progressed, Arild sent coded messages from Spitsbergen to Oslo with status updates and weather reports.³⁸⁷ By 18 April 1926, all work on both the hangar and a mooring mast were complete.³⁸⁸

When spring arrived, a whole new logistical job had to be done. This included shipping over 1,100 metric tons of goods from Italy to Norway with the ship *Vaga*, including mooring masts, 6,300 steel bottles of hydrogen gas, and 100 crates of machine goods.³⁸⁹ The ship was also to carry 15 tons of sailcloth that was going to form the side cover and wind shield for the airship hangar.

The polar film for the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight was also a responsibility of Thommessen. Based on their earlier cooperation, J.Chr. Gundersen was again used to sell the polar film for NLF. Both parties signed a contract giving Gundersen the world rights for the movie, awarding the NLF 70% of the income and Gundersen 30%, identical to the terms for the previous expedition film. Pathé contacted the NLF at an early stage, claiming that in

³⁸³NBO Ms. 4° 2401:X:K: Two telegrams, both from Kings Bay Kul Compani A/S to NLF, dated 29 and 30 October 1925.

³⁸⁴NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:Luftskipshallen: Signed contract between NLF and Ferd. R. Arild, dated 7 October 1925.

³⁸⁵NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:Luftskipshallen: Document containing estimates of construction cost, not signed, not dated.

³⁸⁶NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:Lund-Ly-Lø:The ship hired to ferry goods and people to and from Spitsbergen, in letter to NLF from Skibsmægler (shipbroker) Per T. Lykke, dated 10 October 1925.

³⁸⁷NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:Luftskipshallen: Telegram to NLF from Lund, in code, dated 26 March 1926.

³⁸⁸NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:Luftskipshallen: Telegram to NLF from Lund, dated 18 April 1926.

³⁸⁹NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XI:Lo-Ludolph: Letter to Lorentzen & Co Shipbrokers from NLF, dated 20 January 1926.

order to ensure good sales, it was important to release a film as close to the finish as possible. Pathé also informed the expedition that they were willing to buy the rights to the polar film for USD 5.00 for each foot of film used, which would amount to about USD 30,000³⁹⁰ for the planned film.³⁹¹

Nothing else seems to have been done until a telegram arrived from Pathé News stating that it wished to merge the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight film footage with that of Commander Byrd's film footage (Pathé had exclusive rights) of his North Pole flight.³⁹² Pathé writes that such an action would remove competition and create one grand film which would "(...) insure tremendous business and maximum results to you (...)." ³⁹³ The response from Oslo was that they would not accept a deal without a minimum cash amount, paid up-front.³⁹⁴ Amundsen and Ellsworth sent a telegram where they expressed that they considered it "unwise to negotiate with others".³⁹⁵ Then, Thommessen informed Pathé that they could not combine the movie with Byrd's footage, as Amundsen and Ellsworth opposed it.³⁹⁶ Pathé then offered to use two reels of film from the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight as a separate news feature³⁹⁷, to which Thommessen replied that they only wanted to sell a feature film.³⁹⁸ This brought the negotiations to a halt, as it appears that the rights were sold to International Newsreel, according to a telegram sent by Pathé News to NLF.³⁹⁹ The movie itself did not manage to bring in any foreign sales, and there are no records of the polar film generating any income in Norway or abroad. That Byrd at the time was believed to have reached the pole first, and that Roald Amundsen and Ellsworth flatly refused to have their account used alongside Byrd's account may have caused Amundsen and Ellsworth's film to be overshadowed by Byrd's achievement. It may well be that the insistence on a separate film had the unfortunate consequence that none wanted to buy it, as it was a tale of the second

³⁹⁰ USD 5.00 pr foot, multiplied by 3 to get USD pr meter, times 2000 meters of film equals a maximum offer at about USD 30,000.

³⁹¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Letter from Pathé News / Pathé Review to Thommessen, dated 21 January 1926.

³⁹² Byrd's achievement of the pole has been doubted by many sources, including himself.

³⁹³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Telegram from Cohen at Pathé News to Thommessen, date difficult to read appears to be 1 March 1926.

³⁹⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Sketch of telegram from "Aeroclub" (Thommessen) to Pathé, dated 16 May 1926.

³⁹⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Telegram to Thommessen (*Tiden Tegn*) from Amundsen Ellsworth, dated 17 May 1926.

³⁹⁶ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Sketch of Telegram from "Aeroclub" to Pathé, dated 17 May 1926.

³⁹⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Telegram from Pathé to Thommesen, dated 18 May 1926.

³⁹⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Telegram from Pathé to Thommesen, reply written on bottom, dated 22 May 1926.

³⁹⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:O-P-Q:Op-Pe: Telegram from Pathé to Thommesen, dated 26 May 1926.

best. It may also be possible that the negotiator played his hand poorly and let the guaranteed income drop, trying to get a higher amount of money for the film.

In his litigation against Roald Amundsen, Thommessen claims that it was Amundsen who made the sale of the film difficult, because he used a copy of the film on a lecture tour in December 1926.⁴⁰⁰ But correspondence shows that the sale of the film floundered as early as May 1926. It appears improbable that Roald Amundsen's actions six months later had any impact on the sales of a movie which international media considered uninteresting.

Immediately before the expedition was to leave from Italy for the long trip to Spitsbergen, and due to some complications and demands from the Italians, the expedition was named the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. The change of name was a result of massive Italian political pressure on the NLF to make sure that the Italian contribution to the expedition was not ignored. The naming issue was considered controversial by some, as it appears that a faction within the expedition, fronted by Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, was opposed to a change of name and made preparations to continue the expedition without the Italians.⁴⁰¹ Thommessen stated in his account that he was afraid the Italian government might have broken their contract with the NLF and A/S Amundsen-Ellsworth polflyvning if the name had remained unchanged. "–Nobile " was added to honour the designer, constructor and pilot Nobile, give recognition to the Italian state and to make sure that the words "American–Italian–Norwegian" were kept out.⁴⁰² Nobile was critical to the success of the expedition, a fact that could not be ignored, and it meant that Amundsen and Ellsworth, who did not know how to fly an airship, would have to share some prestige. The naming issue was finalized in Oslo on 16 March, when Amundsen, Thommessen, Ellsworth and Riiser-Larsen were present and went along with calling the expedition the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight.⁴⁰³

The name of the expedition was only one of several political implications. On 30 December 1925, Thommessen received a note from the Norwegian foreign ministry informing him that it had received information that the Italians regarded their participation in the expedition as a

⁴⁰⁰ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen (I). 123.

⁴⁰¹ Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 440.

⁴⁰² NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen (I). 72.

⁴⁰³ Wisting. *Roald Amundsen*. 2011. 466-468; Boman-Larsen. *Roald Amundsen*. 1995. 438.

purely political matter, and that all decisions would have to be approved by the Italian government,⁴⁰⁴ in other words by Benito Mussolini.

Thommessen wrote that all matters of importance for the expedition were to be approved by Mussolini himself. This peeled away layers of bureaucracy and put the expedition on the fast track. Furthermore, Mussolini's involvement meant that Italy was willing to spend vast amounts of money on the expedition. The head of state's involvement also generated increased pressure for results, and there was also pressure to make the Italian wishes more explicit in the expedition. According to Thommessen, Mussolini hampered Nobile in his work and made it more difficult for the NLF to negotiate, as every matter had to be brought before him before a decision could be made. Thommessen also noted that the Norwegian government considered the expedition to be irrelevant to its affairs.⁴⁰⁵ This statement may well reflect Thommessen's manoeuvrings rather than an indication of the actual state of affairs. Thommessen had claimed that an expedition would have been impossible to arrange without the help of a state, such as Italy.⁴⁰⁶ The Norwegian government showed clear interest in the expedition through its donations. Moreover, Amundsen was instructed to claim any new land for the Norwegian crown. And of course, even if it was not directly sponsoring the expedition, the Norwegian government was certainly interested in having the flag prominently displayed over the Arctic, as further evidence of the nation's role as a leading polar power.

In order to understand this expedition and particularly its aftermath, it may be best to see it as two separate ventures: The first a Norwegian (propaganda) expedition to fly across the Arctic basin and reach the North Pole, led by Roald Amundsen. The second as an Italian propaganda expedition to the North Pole led by Mussolini, in which Amundsen was present, but did not do anything. The Italian government was very specific in its use of language when talking about the expedition. In documents from Italian officials, the expedition is called "Spedizione Italo-Norvegese al Polo Nord", the Italian-Norwegian expedition to the North Pole.⁴⁰⁷ It might mean that there was a policy of referring to the expedition as Italian-Norwegian, rather than as Norwegian under the leadership of Roald Amundsen and Lincoln Ellsworth, or as the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight.

⁴⁰⁴ NBO Ms. Fol 2640 Rolf Thommessen(II). Bilag XXXII and XXXIII.

⁴⁰⁵ NBO: Ms. Fol. 2640 Rolf Thommessen. (I) 29.

⁴⁰⁶ NBO: Ms. Fol. 2640 Rolf Thommessen. (I) 74.

⁴⁰⁷ NBO: Ms. 4° 2401:X: I-J: Letter from Regia Legazion d'Italia, Assumed that recipient is Rolf Thommesen, dated 16 March 1926.

The issue of naming and fronting of nationalities did not go unnoticed. In his book, which cannot be seen as impartial, Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen claims that the Italians had no knowledge of it being a Norwegian expedition, and that they considered it a purely Italian initiated and planned expedition, with a small contribution from Norwegians with polar experience.⁴⁰⁸

Wisting also fronts this view in his biography on Amundsen.⁴⁰⁹ Wisting also makes a point of the political views of Mussolini and the Italian propaganda machinery on this issue, writing that the news of the expedition was followed with interest in “Little Italy” in New York, where it was known as an expedition with Roald Amundsen, led by Benito Mussolini.⁴¹⁰

Another indication that the Italians viewed the expedition as an Italian venture was that a Major Vallini, who was part of the expedition’s ground crew, praised the Italian part of the expedition and reduced the Norwegian involvement to almost nothing in a “tasteless and tactless” way in the newspaper *Giornale d’Italia*.⁴¹¹

Another incident that shows the Italian view of the expedition occurred on 18 January, when Riiser-Larsen and Nobile left for Leningrad in the Soviet Union to negotiate with Soviet authorities on the use of an airship hangar where *NI Norge* was to stay and wait for good weather conditions before flying to Svalbard. A letter from the negotiations confirms that the Norwegian foreign ministry feared that the Italians were using the expedition to further their own cause. When Riiser-Larsen arrived from Leningrad after negotiations with the Soviets, he informed the foreign ministry that the Italians were using the airship *NI Norge* as an example of Italian industry and emphasized the Italian participation in the expedition. The Italians went so far as to object to the Norwegian consul’s presence at the negotiations with the Soviets.⁴¹² The fact remains that *NI Norge* was a product of Italian industry, but both nations were equally eager to claim the credit for the expedition.

The Norwegian cabinet kept a close watch on the developments in the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight, and reports were sent to the prime minister, Johan Ludwig Mowinckel, detailing the political and diplomatic views on the expedition and the impact it had on Norwegian-Italian relations.⁴¹³ As mentioned earlier, the Italian government viewed

⁴⁰⁸ Riiser-Larsen, *Femti år for Kongen*. 1957. 125.

⁴⁰⁹ Wisting. *Roald Amundsen*. 2011. 482.

⁴¹⁰ Wisting. *Roald Amundsen*. 2011. 483.

⁴¹¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:U-Utenriksdepartementet: secret letter from Charge d’affaires O.C.L. Vangsten to Utenriksdepartementet, dated 21 July 1926.

⁴¹² NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:U-Utenriksdepartementet: Letter to Alf Bryn from Royal Foreign Ministry (Signature unreadable), J.nr 3036, dated 6 February 1926.

⁴¹³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: XX: U-Utenriksdepartementet: Letter from Legation de Norvege (signed Vrangsten) to Statsministeren (Prime Minister) J. L. Mowinckel, copy, dated 2 September 1925.

their involvement in the expedition as a political matter, and all decisions regarding the Italian part of the expedition were to be made by the government personified, Benito Mussolini.⁴¹⁴ In Norway, this caused unease and forced a response, as the Norwegians were trying to minimize and reduce the visibility of the Italians. In a personal letter to Thommessen, a member of the Norwegian legation in Italy wrote that:

During the preparations [for the expedition], it has become apparent that our cooperation with the Italians has developed into something far more substantial and active than had been foreseen when we started this venture. (...). In addition to the purely moral implications, the abovementioned has entailed both direct and indirect cooperation with the Italian government which, if translated to monetary value, would amount to accountable funds close to 3,000,000 lire. This is in addition to the funds stipulated in the contracts (...).⁴¹⁵

The contribution of the Italian government was far more extensive than the Norwegians had envisaged. Further, it is stated in the letter that Mr Vangensten of the Norwegian legation had done all he could to keep his official role out of his talks with the Italians, and that no content of his conversations with the Italians had been reported through official channels. His argument was that the Norwegian government had nothing to do with the expedition for political reasons:

(...) especially that the Norwegian state and government have nothing to do with this venture, among other reasons in order to, if possible, slow down somewhat the Italian government's rather aggressive assertion of the political momentum, that seen from a Norwegian standpoint, at least theoretically, is of no interest.⁴¹⁶

The issue of allowing the Italians to drop a flag at the North Pole was yet another issue that made the Norwegians wince, as: "As is known, last year Amundsen was under orders to, and had the necessary authority to claim any newly discovered land in the name of His Majesty the king of Norway; he is certain to receive the same orders this year."⁴¹⁷ Vangensten also makes a point of what the NLF had to do in order to make it clear that the expedition was to be considered Norwegian:

(...) in my opinion, it is quite necessary that we, from the Norwegian point of view, systematically form a counterweight [to the Italian perspective] by tactfully attempting to use whatever means available to emphasise that the expedition is Amundsen's and Norwegian by initiative and concerning

⁴¹⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:U-Utenriksdepartementet: Classified letter from Legation de Norvege (No. 454) to J. L. Mowinckel, dated 21 December 1925.

⁴¹⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Confidential letter from Ove Vangensten to Rolf Thommessen. 2, dated 4 february 1926. Author's Translation.

⁴¹⁶ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Confidential letter from Ove Vangensten to Rolf Thommessen. 3, 4, dated 4 February 1926.

⁴¹⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Confidential letter from Ove Vangensten to Rolf Thommessen. 5, dated 4 February 1926.

all essentials (...). I consider it absolutely necessary that Amundsen himself travel down here (...). At the first occasion possible, you should be present as well (...).⁴¹⁸ (Underscoring in original letter).

Vangensten also wrote that when the crew arrived in Italy for training, they too would be used in his plans to make the expedition more Norwegian:

(...) they [the crew] will not be allowed to hide; on the contrary, they will be "put on display" (...), "become fashionable" here and thus be utilized for propaganda purposes, not only for the polar flight, but also for Norway in general.⁴¹⁹ (Quotation marks from original letter).

Vangenstein writes that he had been very busy in his attempts to silently counteract the Italians' political moves. He also made it very clear that any negotiations he was to be involved in had to be verbal only, so that no written accounts could be misused if they ended up in the wrong hands.⁴²⁰

Another Italian act was a wish to exchange honorary medals. Thommessen did what he could to persuade the Norwegian government to accept such a move, but the prime minister did not wish to do such a thing, and the master of ceremonies was appalled when he heard that the NLF had nominated Mussolini for a Royal Norwegian order of St. Olav in gold. Thommessen wrote to Vangensten that he also had to get a medal for Lincoln Ellsworth, as:

As you know, he has granted USD 100,000 to the new expedition, and is furthermore its official leader along with Amundsen, and in every respect he is to be considered a gentleman, even though his importance, disregarding his large monetary contribution, is naturally quite limited.⁴²¹

No medals were exchanged, as the Italians were slowly convinced that the expedition was a private affair arranged by Roald Amundsen and the NLF.

A later letter from Vangensten, sent through official channels in order to keep it secret, stressed the importance of "keeping the Italians from being equals in the expedition", as this would be disastrous for the Norwegian character of the expedition,⁴²² part of the disaster being that an Italian expedition leader would have the authority to change the goal and the character of the expedition. Indeed, this had been one of the Italians' original demands, as they wanted Nobile to be the leader of the expedition while it was airborne, and for him to

⁴¹⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Confidential letter from Ove Vangensten to Rolf Thommessen. 8, dated 4 February 1926.

⁴¹⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Confidential letter from Ove Vangensten to Rolf Thommessen. 9, dated 4 February 1926.

⁴²⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Confidential letter from Ove Vangensten to Rolf Thommessen. 5, dated 4 February 1926.

⁴²¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XX:V: Letter to Ove Vangensten from Rolf Thommessen on NLF official paper. 3, dated 3 March 1926.

⁴²² NBO Ms. 4° 2401 XX:V: extract from telegram marked "secret", from the Legation in Rome to Utenriksdepartementet, dated 14 March 1926.

have the power to turn the expedition around at the North Pole if he so chose.⁴²³ Amundsen and Ellsworth flatly refused this, and Thommessen and NLF agreed.

It appears as NLF and Amundsen had entered into an agreement with the Italian government that was both naive and opportunistic. It appears as likely that Mussolini may have seen the combination of a known polar explorer and symbolic Italian airship as an invitation to make a propaganda coup, rather than a friendly gesture to help Roald Amundsen achieve his goals. When the contracts had been signed, and the consequences became apparent, it may be possible that members of the Norwegian government noticed this as a possible embarrassment, and took steps to minimize their risk by for instance refusing to exchange medals. The continuous Norwegian steps to reduce the visibility of the Italians appear to be motivated by the consequences of what they should have assumed from the start, that the expedition was not a way for Mussolini to become friendly with Amundsen.

The Norwegian Storting did show interest in the expedition. The navy ship *Farm* was at Amundsen's disposal during the summer of 1926, documents at the Storting show that funds were made available to pay for the crew and "manoeuvres", as had been done in 1925,⁴²⁴ and the ships *Heimdals* and *Michael Sars* were supposed to be made available to the expedition, according to Stortingsmelding nr. 16, 1926. One of the reasons listed was that the expedition had a national character and that the cost of the support would be minimal, as the ships were supposed to be in the area at the time anyway.⁴²⁵ The cost of helping Amundsen with two ships would be tiny, claimed the committee responsible, and a unanimous Storting, without any debate, approved the proposal.⁴²⁶

According to Thommessen's account, the government support with ships was also made available in order to make sure that the Italians did not send a warship to Spitsbergen to support the expedition, which would have been damaging to the Norwegian character of the expedition.⁴²⁷ Small favours and help from lower level officials were also a part of the political wish to further the Norwegian cause through a successful Roald Amundsen. The

⁴²³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401 XX:V: extract from telegram marked "secret", from the Norwegian legation in Rome to the foreign ministry, dated 14 March 1926.

⁴²⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII: F: Fa-Fe, copy of St.prp.nr 23-1925, sent from "avdelingsjefen i Marinestyrelsen" to Stortingsmann (Member of Parliament) Sollie, not dated. (The ship was lent to both Amundsen and Adolf Hoel).

⁴²⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. St. med. nr. 16. (1926) attached to letter from Forsvarsdepartementet F.D.M.I J.Nr. 216-270/26, dated 23 March 1926..

⁴²⁶ Kongeriket Norges femogsyttiende ordentlige Stortingsforhandlinger 1926 7a / 7b. 1119 (in relation to Stortingsforhandlinger 1926, Innst. S. Nr 64. 6a /6b).

⁴²⁷ NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Rolf Thommessen (I). 54.

NLF had asked the government if they could continue their tax agreement from 1924.⁴²⁸ As during the expedition in 1925, the 1926 expedition was given the right to import goods and foodstuffs duty-free, as long as it was properly marked as property of the expedition. This was ordered by the government in a resolution made on 29 October 1925.⁴²⁹

The Norwegian government also allowed the expedition to borrow equipment. The *Maud* expedition had borrowed all its weapons and ammunition from the Norwegian army. When the NLF asked if it could borrow weapons⁴³⁰ for the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight in February 1926, it was at originally refused because the weapons borrowed to the *Maud* expedition, or Roald Amundsen personally, had never been returned. Only when those weapons were returned would the army reconsider lending them weapons.⁴³¹ In theory, the NLF had nothing to do with the *Maud* expedition, but it did not take long before the missing weapons were returned, except those who were in the possession of expedition members Tessem and Knudsen when they disappeared.⁴³² Other items borrowed from the army included floodlights and searchlights that would be used in case it was dark when *NI Norge* arrived.⁴³³ Sleeping mats, clothing and blankets for most of those affiliated with the expedition were also borrowed from the army.⁴³⁴

The department of defence also helped the expedition secure permissions to fly across the airspace of the nations in the planned flight path. The airship was given instructions that certain areas were no fly zones, while others were no photography zones, as the borders in 1920's Europe were mostly military no go zones. The department of defence formally allowed Nobile to fly *NI Norge* in Norway for three months.⁴³⁵

⁴²⁸ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:FI: Copy of letter to Det Kgl. Norske Tolddeartement from NLF, dated 1 October 1925.

⁴²⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Fi Letter to NLF from Distriktstollinspektøren for Oslo Tolldistrikt Jnr.A-II-4-363/1925, dated 10 November 1925. «... Ved regjeringens resolusjon av 29. f.m. er det bestemt: ...».

⁴³⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. Letter from NLF to Det kgl. Forsvarsdepartement, dated 10 February 1926.

⁴³¹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. From the Generalfelttøimesteren to NLF Letter 181/26.5, dated 19 February 1926.

⁴³² NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. Letter to NLF from Det Kongelige Forsvars Departement. Letter concerned with missing weapons from Maud expedition that had not been returned. J.Nr.222/26.5 The weapons in question were two 6,5 mm rifles (No: 109258 and 108260) and one 11,25 mm Colt (No 1443), not dated.

⁴³³ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. Letter to Herr Oberst Roll from NLF, dated 23 March 1926.

⁴³⁴ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. Letter to NLF from Det kongelige Forsvars Departement. J.Nr. 633/26.4 dated 12 April 1926.

⁴³⁵ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. Letter to NLF from Det Kongelige Forsvarsdepartement J.Nr. 424/26.5, dated 12 April 1926.

An important example of small favours done by the government and its officials was that the registration number of *NI Norge* was supposed to be *N28*, as in *N28 Norge*. But someone had informed the NLF that the Norwegian registration number *NI* was available, and it was assigned to the airship.⁴³⁶ This also allowed the expedition to save funds, as the number written on the airship in large letters did not have to be changed.

A political issue arose with respect to the high number of personnel holding military rank involved in the project. A diplomat in Great Britain raised questions with regard to the numerous men aboard holding military ranks and the nature of the flag *NI Norge* flew under. The response from the NLF claims that *NI Norge* flew under a merchant flag, and that all men aboard who held a military rank, were on unpaid leave from the military service and were hired as civilians.⁴³⁷ This was true for the Norwegians, but not for the Italians. Nobile was not hired as a private person, but was ordered⁴³⁸ to work on *NI Norge* as an Italian officer, and received salaries from both the expedition and the Italian government. All the Italian members of the expedition were active duty personnel that were paid both by the Italian government and by the expedition.

The goal was to sail from Spitsbergen to the North Pole and continue to Nome in Alaska. The flags of all three nations were dropped on the Pole, and the act was painstakingly documented. On 17 May 1926, after an eventful journey, the airship landed at Teller, about 100 kilometres north of Nome, Alaska, where it was dismantled.

The expedition itself was a success. In a news statement sent to the *New York Times*, it was described how people responded to the news, that the expedition was a success and what then happened in Oslo. It was written that when news reached Oslo that *NI Norge* had been sighted from Point Barrow, a crowd that had gathered in Akersgaten erupted in “scenes of tumultuous excitement”⁴³⁹. Flags were hoisted, and thousands of issues of the extra newspaper editions were sold. Some even attempted to break into the printing shops to get a fresh copy. The following day it became apparent that the news from the previous day had been, fake and people were more reserved, but a crowd of hundreds had gathered in

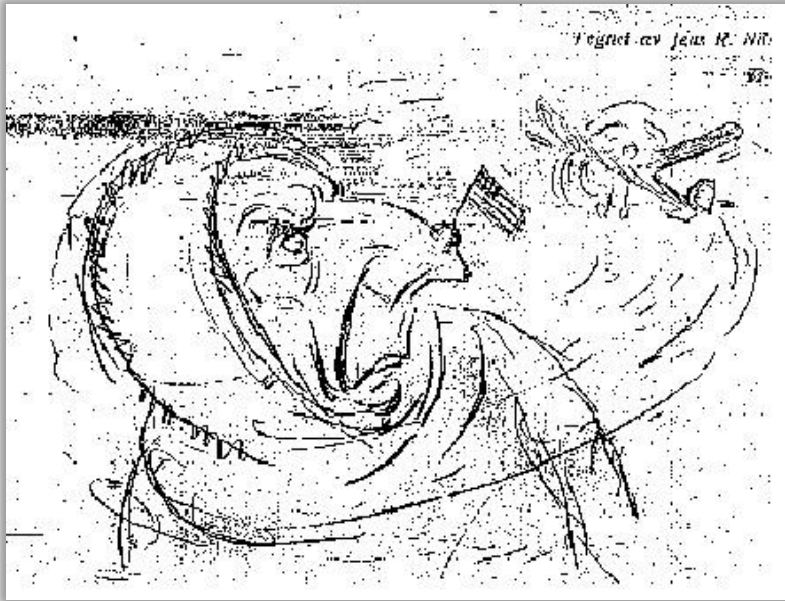
⁴³⁶ NBO Ms. 4° 2401: VII:F:Forsvarsdepartementet. Armèen – luftartsrådet. Copy of interdepartmental letter J. Nr. 65/1926, signed T. Lie, dated 7 April 1926.

⁴³⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIII:No-Norske: Letter to Norwegian Legation in London from NLF, dated 27. March 1926.

⁴³⁸ Technically he was chosen by the Norwegians (NLF), but it appears as a military man he was then given orders to work on the project.

⁴³⁹ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIIIB: New York Times: text titled “Til offentliggjørelse i pressen” to NY Times, dated 16 May 1926.

Akersgaten nonetheless, asking all who came or went of news. When final confirmation came in the late afternoon of 18 May 1926, *Tidens Tegn* was the first to print it, and the special edition of the newspaper was sold out in minutes and “(...) even [office] staff [were] assisting street sale [in] order [to] satisfy everyone’s demand for news (...)”.⁴⁴⁰ So the news that Amundsen had finally reached the North Pole was major news in Norway, but it was believed internationally that Richard Byrd had been first.



The Norwegian government showed its gratitude to the members of the expedition, as Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, Oscar Wisting and Oscar Omdal were all promoted by the Storting. The case of Riiser-Larsen became a political issue, as he was promoted on merits, which had never been done before in the Norwegian navy, and

this caused immediate controversy. It was customary to promote a whole class at once. In the following debate, the prime minister, Mowinckel made it clear that the promotion was a sign of gratitude for his actions and his work. The Storting approved the motion.⁴⁴¹

The troubles between the members of the expedition came in stark contrast to the festivities held when Amundsen and Ellsworth arrived in Norway. The Norwegian (and American) members arrived in Oslo with the ship *Stavangerfjord*, and were formally received at Honnørbryggen (The Honorary Pier) by Oslo Kommune (Oslo County) and the city’s major and the president of the Storting. Afterwards, they were taken by horse and carriage to the royal palace, where they had an audience with His Majesty Haakon VII. The explorers were staying at the Grand Hotel. A dinner party in their honour was held at Bristol Hotel, at which the minister of defence held a speech. Meanwhile, a party was arranged by the

⁴⁴⁰ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:XIIIB: New York Times: text titled “Til offentliggjørelse i pressen” to NY Times, dated 16 May 1926.

⁴⁴¹ Stortingsforhandlinger, 1926. 7a / 7b. 2624–2627.

Fedrelandslaget at Akershus Festning (Akershus Fortress), where Fridtjof Nansen held a speech.

While the Americans in the USA were still cheering their own hero, Byrd, who was at the time believed to be the first person to fly to the North Pole, one can say that the Norwegians and Italians, represented by Amundsen and Nobile, were locked in a battle for glory in the press.

The aftermath of the expedition was not a success for any of the involved parties. The controversy has received considerable attention in the literature on the expedition. Bomann-Larsen writes that Amundsen was the one who first breached the peace, as he and Ellsworth had to accept that Nobile had been made into a third leader of the expedition.⁴⁴² Since no new land was discovered, most of the honour for a successful flight went to Nobile, who was the leader of the airship. Amundsen had considered the expedition a formality to get him to the pole.⁴⁴³ In Bomann-Larsen's account, Roald Amundsen was an infuriated man who looked for an excuse to break the contract with the NLF, which indeed occurred on 29 July 1926.⁴⁴⁴

Roald Berg views the trouble that led to the break as underlying rivalries based in masculine honour,⁴⁴⁵ as Nobile was a competitor for the honour that should befall Roald Amundsen, and that this rivalry caused a clash of personalities.⁴⁴⁶ Amundsen broke with the NLF upon his return to Norway in August 1926 over an issue on some equipment that had been lent to the Italians.⁴⁴⁷ This led to the collapse of the NLF in January 1928.⁴⁴⁸

Alexander Wisting dates the break differently, as he views the struggle as a result of ambiguous contracts, miscommunication and national pride.⁴⁴⁹ It appears difficult, if not impossible to put the finger on any specific person or act that led to the trouble. Much of the trouble that happened in the aftermath of the expedition came from the uncomfortable fact that the NLF was insolvent and owed a considerable amount of money to the Italian government, which may have used this debt as leverage.

⁴⁴² Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 463.

⁴⁴³ Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 463.

⁴⁴⁴ Bomann-Larsen *Roald Amundsen* 1995. 477.

⁴⁴⁵ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 265.

⁴⁴⁶ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 266.

⁴⁴⁷ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 267.

⁴⁴⁸ Berg. *Norsk Polarhistorie I* 2004. 267.

⁴⁴⁹ Wisting. *Roald Amundsen*. 2011. 492–493.

According to the sales contract signed on 1 September 1925, Italy was bound to buy back *NI Norge* when the expedition was finished. These negotiations had collapsed, and Thommessen had to travel to Italy himself to negotiate. He managed to solve the problems, but he was forced to make concessions. The Italians were allowed to use the airship hangar at Kings Bay “free of charge” for an upcoming Italian expedition. In his account, Thommessen states that the loan of the hangar was not “free”, but that it was a way for the NLF to reduce their considerable debt to the Italian government.⁴⁵⁰

Was his expedition made in the name of science or sensation? In a scientific journal, Lincoln Ellsworth claimed that the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight had scientific value, but he did not use the word science when he wrote his account of the journey with *NI Norge*.⁴⁵¹ Likewise, Umberto Nobile does not mention science in his book *My polar flights*⁴⁵², or in his contemporary articles “The dirigible and polar exploration”⁴⁵³ and “Navigating the “Norge” from Rome to the North Pole and Beyond”⁴⁵⁴. Roald Amundsen mentions that the goal of the expedition was to explore the unknown, but he also states that he denied a scientist access to the expedition.⁴⁵⁵ The expedition appears to have had nothing to do with science, and scientists, it seems, were not welcome.

In November 1926, when Nobile toured the USA on a mission from the Italian state, it was reported through diplomatic channels that Nobile had made several claims in his lectures, including that Mussolini had ordered the expedition, that the idea to use an airship to cross the pole had first come from the Italians, and that Amundsen had allegedly had an idea to this effect, but that his came after the Italians’. Nobile also claimed that the Italians were the key to the success of the expedition. Furthermore, he claimed that Ellsworth “and others” deserved credit, but that most should go to Mussolini.⁴⁵⁶ When Amundsen discovered that Nobile did a tour of the USA, he had himself and Ellsworth removed as honorary members of

⁴⁵⁰ NBO Ms 4° 2401:XX:V: Statement from Vangsten to Sørenskriveren i Aker, dated 11 February 1927; NBO Ms. Fol. 2640 Thommessen (I). 119.

⁴⁵¹ Ellsworth, Lincoln “Arctic Flying Experiences by Airplane and Airship” in W.L.G. Joerg (ed) *Problems of Polar Research A series of papers by thirty-one authors. American Geographical society special publication No. 7* New York: American Geographical Society, 1928. 412–417.

⁴⁵² Nobile, Umberto. *My Polar Flights. An account of the voyages of the airships Italia and Norge*. Translated by Frances Fleetwood, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1961.

⁴⁵³ Nobile, Umberto. “The Dirigible and Polar exploration” in W.L.G. Joerg (ed) *Problems of Polar Research A series of papers by thirty-one authors. American Geographical society special publication No. 7* New York: American Geographical Society, 1928.

⁴⁵⁴ Nobile, Umberto. “Navigating the “Norge” from Rome to the North Pole and beyond” *National Geographic magazine*, Volume LII, No 2, 1927.

⁴⁵⁵ Amundsen, Roald. *Den første flukt over polhavet*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1926. 14

⁴⁵⁶ NBO Ms 4° 2401:XX:U-Utenriksdepartementet: Letter from Det. Kgl. Utenriksdepartement (J.Nr.30325) to Norsk Luftseiladsforening, dated 16 November 1926.

the NLF. This caused Thommessen to publicly denounce the actions of Roald Amundsen as a breach of contract, and he used his paper *Tidens Tegn* to wage a front-page polemic discrediting Amundsen. Amundsen was then sued by the NLF for violating his contract. The polemic can be found in most papers in December 1926.

The expedition was, at the same time, Amundsen's life-goal achievement, his final expedition, and a way to show off Norway as a polar nation. But the expedition was much more: It entailed a union between media and expedition, as well as a resource for launching the new Italy through propaganda. Umberto Nobile's achievement as a designer, builder and pilot of an airship across the world's most inhospitable ocean was as much a part of the expedition as Amundsen's narrowly focused aims. All these factors fed a sensation-hungry press with newsworthy material. At the time, it was the world's most technologically sophisticated and expensive expedition. It reached its goals, but it failed to be remembered with dignity.

The legal battle and the public dispute were never officially resolved. Roald Amundsen died in the *Latham* air crash during his own private rescue expedition to save Umberto Nobile after the airship *Italia* crashed northeast of Spitsbergen in 1928. At that time, the transpolar expedition had accumulated a debt of about NOK 638,000⁴⁵⁷, of which NOK 400,000 was never repaid. A/S Amundsen–Ellsworths polflyvning 1925 was liquidated and finally dissolved in 1933.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ NBO Ms. 4° 2401:III:Økonomi: Estimate of debt owed by A/S Rolad Amundsens polflyvning, in 1927, undated.

⁴⁵⁸ NBO Ms 4° 2401: III: Økonomi: Document describing final dissolvment of company, dated 31 January 1933.

5

Roald Amundsen's expeditions in the media and politics from *Maud* to *N1 Norge*

During the *Maud* expedition, phase A, there appears to be no cooperation between the expedition and the media, but the media were positive in their coverage. Even the comic press was positive. *Maud* was initially launched with the intent to finalize the dream of reaching the North Pole by ship, the completion of Fridtjof Nansen's scientific work and, as the magazine *Exlex* portrayed, to make Norway the only polar nation to have conquered both poles. Scientific research was the main focus of the expedition, and the "record" of the North Pole was only a secondary goal. The Norwegian government may have had an intent to fund the expedition to create a new national celebration such as had happened with *Fram* I. The government had interests in the *Maud* expedition, but due to the lack of debate, it is unclear how the Storting viewed the expedition in relation to Norwegian politics. The government granted funds for a support expedition to lay out depots on East Greenland in 1919, the Thule Expedition, and furnished *Maud* with unofficial support such as weapons borrowed from the army. It is not known whether the expedition borrowed other equipment, but it may be probable. The year *Maud* was launched also marked the year that Norwegian foreign policy overtly shifted towards expansion. The amount of support given to *Maud* can be interpreted as a sign that it was supported to further Norwegian interest in the Arctic, and possibly as a sign of intent of a Norwegian expansionist policy in the Arctic. The result of *Maud* was completely different, as it failed to accomplish any of the goals set out in 1918. Men had been lost, the crew left the expedition, but the details about how the expedition unravelled were kept away from the media.

After the initial disappointments of the first phase of the expedition, the non-planned sailing through the Northeast Passage and refitting in port, phase B was launched in great haste. There is no evidence to indicate media involvement other than an appetite to report news from the expedition. What was written in the media conforms to what was reported on the expedition and what has later been written in history books. Nothing negative was hidden, and

although some of the press remained largely positive, such as *Aftenposten*, other parts of the press were negative, such as *Dagbladet*. This was especially true with regard to the comic press. The time lag between actual events and these events being reported in the Norwegian media caused confusion as reports from *Maud*, phase A were reported at the same time as *Maud*, phase B was launched. Although it was reported that much scientific data had been collected, there were no particularly newsworthy discoveries. Similarly there was not much to report in the way of sport or sensation. *Maud*, phase B was not involved in politics directly, and achieved nothing, but during the expedition, the Norwegian government secretly granted NOK 500,000 to the expedition as a whole. When Amundsen returned from *Maud*, phase B, and asked the Norwegian government for funds, these were used to finance *Maud*, phase C. This can be seen in two ways, that the Storting was uninterested in a debate, which might have been embarrassing, or the lack of discussion can be taken as a sign of confidence in Roald Amundsen. The expedition was saved by the grant of half a million kroner, which was commented on in *Aftenposten*, criticized in *Dagbladet*, and made fun of in the comic press.

Amundsen abandoned the *Maud* expedition as it entered phase C; the expedition continued under the command of Oscar Wisting. There was cooperation between the media and *Maud*, phase C. But the sums involved were small (NOK 14,000), and compared to the direct government funding (NOK 700,000) it cannot be called a commercial expedition. It can be claimed that the *Maud*, phase C initiated contractual cooperation between media and expedition. Having bought rights to news coverage, the involved media then tended to publish primarily positive accounts, in contrast to media that had not entered into cooperation. This positive coverage may have been influenced by the fact that the source of negative news, Roald Amundsen, was no longer present aboard. *Maud*, phase C was a scientific exploratory expedition funded mostly by government money with the intent of completing the work of Nansen and indirectly furthering the cause of the Norwegian policy of Arctic expansion. The result was an expedition that was aborted, but which returned home with a substantial amount of scientific data from the Arctic, that subsequently was published as part of Norway's significant contributions to polar research.

The *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight was launched in tandem with *Maud*, phase C and did not achieve anything in relation to the goal that the name implies, namely an airplane expedition across the Arctic basin. The expedition was the beginning of the cooperation between explorer and media, which in turn resulted in news coverage slanted with a positive and sensational twist. Amundsen of course disappointed his supporters, but criticism came

mostly from *Dagbladet* and the comic press, who were not part of the cooperation between media and the explorer.

The union between the expedition and the media also led to other problems, namely that the “truth” of what happened was dictated by Roald Amundsen, as other sources were deemed unreliable or as outright rumours. Neither critics nor those who cooperated sent their own correspondent along to the expedition site and as a result, literature and media are in agreement on what happened because in the end, the source for both was Roald Amundsen’s personal account. The litigation letter from John M. Larsen provides a counter story; one with a more complete picture. Larsen’s account shows that uncomfortable facts were disregarded in the news from Amundsen, which was taken as unproblematic truth.

The political opinion is not clear on the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight, as the Norwegian Storting did not have a debate on the safety-expedition for Roald Amundsen, but donated NOK 60,000 without debate. That the government issued the funds and launched an expedition to provide rescue assistance does show an interest in the safety of the expedition. The choice to cancel the expedition resulted in consequences later. That the expedition failed, was a setback for Roald Amundsen, but the political expansion into the Arctic had taken on a life of its own, and in 1923 plans to bring Svalbard under Norwegian control were well under way, and the popular movement to acquire Greenland was gaining momentum.

In contrast to the ship-based *Maud* expedition, it became apparent during the *Maud* Expedition Transarctic Flight that Roald Amundsen was not critical to the completion of the expedition. Larsen made the machines, and the one who could make them work and fly, was Oscar Omdal. The knowledge and know-how possessed by Roald Amundsen, which had been so important earlier, would increasingly become superfluous as compared with the knowledge and skills possessed by Omdal. Amundsen’s skills of planning and logistics could not prevent a dismal failure.

The Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight was the first of two expeditions for which the media and expedition cooperated so closely that it can be called a protocoperation. *Tidens Tegn* and the expedition stock company were virtually administered by the same staff. What was printed in the media, which also shaped public opinions on the expedition, was mostly written by NLF’s own correspondent, Fredrik Ramm, or based on his writings. A direct result of this cooperation was that Roald Amundsen’s expeditions received almost uniform positive coverage in the media. That the expedition was a failure seems to have been ignored by the

national media, and that Amundsen was an employee, although an important one, of a company that used his name and hero status, was kept hidden. Foreign media were more sober in their coverage of the expedition. *Hvepsen*, as one of a few members of the comic press, remained sceptical.

When viewed in light of the *Maud* expedition, the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight was not related to science. The expedition was dominated by sensation, and was focused on accumulating as large funds as possible in order to fund a larger and grander expedition.

There appears to be a consensus in literature and sources that Roald Amundsen was not critical for the operations of the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Flight, as his skills were not needed. The mechanics and pilots proved critical for the operation of the airplanes and for bringing them back safely. Planning and logistics as well as the safe return was done by NLF. Amundsen was important to the initiation of the expedition, moreover his name, his symbolic status and his fame opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed.

Rolf Thommessen may have profited from the cooperation with Roald Amundsen as editor of *Tidens Tegn*. Additionally, he might have been able to use the intense popularity of Roald Amundsen to further his own agenda as a member of a political lobby group working to make Greenland a Norwegian domain. The Norwegian Storting may also have had its own agenda. Leading members of the political leadership of Norway wanted to support the expedition and use it to further their own agendas, namely to reinforce at home and abroad the image of Norway as a leading polar nation, based on the courage and will-power of its manly polar heroes. As such, highly-visible polar exploits that captured media and public attention indirectly served as a form of legitimizing the expansion into the Arctic and also to further what was a national policy and was beginning to turn into a tradition. Norway was expanding into the Arctic, and the support for the expedition was a national political issue which determined the role of Norway in international affairs. In the eyes of the Prime Minister Mowinckel, Roald Amundsen was virtually one with the Norwegian people, and highly visible as a beacon of what Norway wanted to be and achieve in international affairs. The government may have had an intent to support Roald Amundsen in order to be able to use Amundsen's actions to demonstrate that Norway had interests in the Arctic and Greenland, and as a way to show that Norway had a tradition of being a polar nation, in essence demonstrating continuity. The expansive Norwegian foreign policy not only represented a long-term trend for Norway, the polar nation, but also the beginning of Norway as a polar

imperialist. By finally speaking out in a debate, the Norwegian Storting set a course for Norway in the Arctic which would have future consequences, such as the Greenland issue with Denmark, which was the peak of what has been termed the Norwegian polar imperialism.

During the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight, the media cooperation was even tighter than before, it was a protocoperation. The arrangement resulted in virtually the same text being published not only in the Oslo papers, but also in major newspapers throughout Norway, Europe and the USA. The material was positive towards the expedition and nationalistic in essence. It was printed in the hope that it would increase circulation, which was a way to increase sales on advertisements. The expedition was a union between media and expedition, a fusion of sensation and achievement, a capital-intensive investment. The newspapers did not criticize Roald Amundsen or his expedition while the expedition lasted. The media were dominantly positive during the transpolar expedition, as most leading papers in Norway had made an investment into the expedition and received ready-to-print news from the expedition. It can be argued that the media were losing its objective character and became a medium for patriotic propaganda and hero worship, which makes the use of the media as a source of information increasingly meaningless. The apparent exception was *Hvepsen* from the comic press, which was not part of the arrangement. When the expedition was formally finished, the press, both Norwegian and international, became a battleground between various factions within the expedition. These fought over honour, rights and money, with the result that none was retained by either. The massive negative press coverage and polemic in the papers after the expedition was a public relations disaster for all parties involved, and led to controversies that are yet to be resolved.

Amundsen's last expedition was not connected to scientific work at all, and no account from the members of the expedition mentions that the goal of the expedition was scientific. It appears as though the word was not used in relation to the expedition at all, which is in stark contrast to *Maud*, where science was paramount. The goal was to reach the North Pole and continue on to Alaska. They were the first to travel the shortest distance between Europe and America. The expedition entailed sport and records; sensation with respect to the goal and the means of achieving it, that is a technological symbol of progress and modernity.

Roald Amundsen was not present during most of the preparations for the expedition. He was occupied with various work in the United States, working to raise funds. Others had become

critical, such as Umberto Nobile, Rolf Thommessen, and Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen. Amundsen joined the expedition at Kings Bay in Spitsbergen; 72 hours later he had achieved his goal. He was a leader aboard, but had no task other than sitting and observing. Roald Amundsen had become redundant in his own expedition. Those who appear to have been most important were NLF, represented by Rolf Thommessen, Umberto Nobile, as designer, constructor and pilot, the Fascist state Italy for the considerable support, and Lincoln Ellsworth for his cash donations.

It was during the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar flight that Roald Amundsen was used to further a number of causes simultaneously. In literature and the contemporary media, Amundsen is portrayed as heading a Norwegian expedition that was helped by the Norwegian government, which did what it could to make the expedition appear as Norwegian as possible. At the same time, the Italian government saw its assistance to the expedition as a political issue which went to the highest authority, Benito Mussolini himself. Mussolini used the Italian involvement in the expedition for propaganda purposes, trying to promote Fascist Italy and Italian industrial products. *NI Norge* was that industrial product, but at the same time it was a symbol of progress and the spirit of the futurism so popular in Fascist Italy. In Italy, the expedition was seen as Italian, but with Norwegian helpers. The assistance from the Italian government proved to be substantial, as the expedition ended and the sums that Benito Mussolini and his state had allowed to be used on the expedition, became apparent. This support may have been used to force concessions from NLF, Thommessen and others. In sum, both the Norwegian and the Italian government celebrated and magnified Amundsen and his expedition to further their own agendas. Thommessen may also have used the expedition to further his organization NLF, his newspaper *Tidens Tegn*, and his lobby group which had the explicit goal of claiming Greenland for Norway. Thommessen and his daily paper *Tidens Tegn* had an advantage due the cooperation, as *Tidens Tegn* was the nexus from which all information flowed. It was the paper with the best opportunity to capitalize on the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight. The cooperation between the media and the expedition was so close that it became a defining trait of the expedition.

Conclusion

The expeditions from *Maud* to *NI Norge* became increasingly dependent upon the media. The close linkage and mutual reliance of the expeditions and the media on each other for attaining their respective goals evolved into a proto-cooperation. This intimate relationship also resulted in the involved media becoming increasingly less objective in their reporting and increasingly less willing to cast a negative or critical perspective on Amundsen's exploits. Those newspapers involved with formal cooperation emerged as organs for propaganda for Norwegian patriot hero-worship. The *Maud* expedition began as a scientific endeavour for which the Norwegian state contributed as part of its accepted obligation to increase the knowledge of the Arctic for all of civilization. Of course idealism went hand in hand with more real political ambitions for Norway to establish itself as a major polar nation able to justify its territorial desires through its willingness and ability to contribute to understanding nature in the extreme north. The expedition never achieved its goals, but is remembered for its scientific work. The later expeditions of Roald Amundsen were not related to science, and were increasingly devoted to sensation for funds and to sport as achievement. Amundsen also became less important to the execution of his own expeditions, but he was important for their initiation. The name and symbol of Roald Amundsen was important, the person and personal skill had become redundant. The name and symbol of Roald Amundsen was also used continuously to further the agenda of the Norwegian government, which wanted to appear as the top polar nation in the world, and had an agenda of polar expansion, which was in many ways legitimized by Amundsen's achievements and status. Later, more nations and persons began to use Amundsen to further their own agenda. Benito Mussolini magnified Amundsen to further and glorify his own Fascist state in its early years. Thommessen, it appears, used Amundsen to further his own agendas, and most of those who worked for or with Amundsen, used him as a springboard into famous careers, such as Umberto Nobile and Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, who both became important members of society.

In conclusion, I find that the thesis is valid, but it raises more questions than it answers. It may be interesting to investigate the link between Roald Amundsen and the fledgling Soviet state, as *Maud* operated in an area under its dominion. The exact nature of the cooperation between Amundsen and Rolf Thommessen also warrants more investigation, and there are unanswered questions with regards to party politics in Norway in relation to the polar nation. Major questions are left unanswered in Italian sources in relation to the Fascist involvement in the last expedition in Amundsen's career. Further detail and understanding can also be sought in

the USA, where archive material shedding light on the American view of the expeditions may be available. The last and possibly most important question that remains to be answered is the following: What really happened after *NI Norge* landed in Teller? Who lied and who told the truth when the expedition was formally completed?

I would like to end with an extract from Robert Service and his book *The spell of Yukon* and his poem “The call of the Wild”, cited by Fridtjof Nansen during the memorial service for Roald Amundsen: ⁴⁵⁹

Have you known the Great White Silence, not a snow-gemmed twig aquiver?
 (Eternal truths that shame our soothing lies.)
 Have you broken trail on snowshoes? mushed your huskies up the river,
 Dared the unknown, led the way, and clutched the prize?
 Have you marked the map's void spaces, mingled with the mongrel races,
 Felt the savage strength of brute in every thew?
 And though grim as hell the worst is, can you round it off with curses?
 Then hearken to the Wild – it's wanting you.

Have you suffered, starved and triumphed, groveled down, yet grasped at glory,
Grown bigger in the bigness of the whole?
“Done things” just for the doing, letting babblers tell the story,
Seeing through the nice veneer the naked soul?
Have you seen God in His splendors, heard the text that nature renders?
(You’ll never hear it in the family pew.)
The simple things, the true things, the silent men who do things –
Then listen to the Wild – it’s calling you.

⁴⁵⁹ Robert Service, *The Spell of Yukon*, "The Call of the Wild". Classicreader.com. Copyright Black Dog Media. URL: <http://www.classicreader.com/book/269/7/> (04.11.2011).

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